

# SECRETS

ROGER BATCHELDER



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**SECRETS**







*A First National Picture.*

NORMA TALMADGE AS MARY CARLTON.

*Secrets.*



# SECRETS

ADAPTED FROM THE  
NORMA TALMADGE PICTURE

BY  
ROGER BATCHELDER

*Founded on the  
Sam H. Harris play "SECRETS"  
by Rudolf Besier and May Edginton*

ILLUSTRATED WITH SCENES  
FROM THE PHOTOPLAY  
A FIRST NATIONAL PICTURE



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DEDICATED

TO

NORMA TALMADGE

WHOSE GREAT ARTISTRY IN THE  
DEPICTION OF A WOMAN'S HEART  
LAID BARE HAS INSPIRED THIS STORY

AND TO

RUDOLF BESIER,  
MAY EDGINTON AND  
SAM H. HARRIS

WHO KINDLY GAVE PERMISSION TO  
NOVELIZE THIS BEAUTIFUL PLAY





# SECRETS

## PROLOGUE

THERE was not the usual bustle around the great house on Porchester Terrace this spring afternoon. The iron gates of the driveway which led briefly to the front entrance were closed, though one could see at a certain angle from the street an attendant leaning against the high wall which was surmounted by unevenly cemented pieces of broken glass, according to the English tradition. Even in the rear, where the tradesmen usually drove through the alley, their carts rumbling along the cobblestones, a man was posted to enforce silence and himself take quietly the deliveries to the kitchen.

Sir John Carlton was dying.

The grim, precisely symmetrical stone house looked down upon the scant stretch of lawn and budding or flowering shrubs flanking the inside of the wall, with its background of

ivy and umbrella-like willows, whose drooping branches fell until their slim leaves mingled with the grass. Beyond the wall and this immediate section, where a few old residences had more grounds and larger gardens than are usual to-day around the town houses of London, were the smaller and much more modest houses of Bayswater, utterly unlike the American bungalow, but the nearest English approach to it. They extended along the Thames and went far back until they were stopped by the great houses which had been built years ago.

There were several motors before the house. One was the limousine of Dr. Arbuthnot, a leading pulmonary specialist of London, whose practice in his later years had been necessarily restricted to a few very prominent patrons. His chauffeur sat on the running-board away from the house, smoking and chatting with the man who had recently brought one of the Carlton motors from the garage.

"I'm used to it," he said passively, fumbling for another cigarette.

"They've 'ad me on all day, and it'll be tomorrow before I get 'ome," the Carlton chauffeur told his friend of an hour, with a suspicion

of melancholy. "My partner was on all day yesterday and last night, roundin' up the old gentleman's kids—which was not so funny—and," he sighed, "'ere I am. At that, though," he amended, as if fearful of doing an injustice to a man who was literally worshiped by his servants, "'e was a good bloke. Once when he 'ad me drivin' all through the Lochs on a week-end, he handed me a week's pay extra when we got back 'ome. And when the kid was sick, 'e sent one of his medicos around to 'elp 'er. I 'ope the old lad pulls out of it, even if"—he sighed again—"I 'ave to stay 'ere all night."

Soon he was listening to an enthusiastic account of a wild ride to Sussex, where a peer had been saved by the fast driving of the Arbuthnot chauffeur; and eventually both were talking about Dixmude and Ypres, then on common conversational ground.

Upstairs, in the house, there was the strained hush that accompanies severe illness.

In the dressing-room adjoining Sir John Carlton's bedroom, Robert Carlton smothered a yawn. He, as well as his brother, John, who stood anxiously by the mantel-piece, was formally attired. Their two sisters, Lady Les-



sington and Audrey Carlton, both smoking listlessly, sat on the couch.

“What’s the time, John?” asked Robert wearily.

His brother looked at his watch and said, “Half after five.”

“Oh! This dreadful waiting,” broke in Lady Lessington, who had been called from an auspicious week-end in Scotland to the deathbed of her father. She was a handsome woman, more like her father than Lady Carlton in appearance, but whose obvious distaste for the impending term “middle-aged,” became apparent now and then in her moments of petulance. She had acquired “nerves,” which asserted themselves at times like this. “Sir Gilbert said,” she declared, “that this new treatment of his ought to show some definite result in an hour. It’s now three hours since——”

“Personally,” interrupted Audrey decisively, “I’ve no faith whatever in Sir Gilbert and his treatment—though, of course, one has to try it.” Audrey Carlton was unfortunately masculine in her bearing and in her usual remarks. When Robert had once sug-



gested brutally that she postpone her officiousness until she was safely installed as the head of some household, she had gone into a rage and included all men in her expressions of contempt for him.

“When a man’s seventy-seven,” she asserted, “and gets double pneumonia, the only treatment that can save him is a miracle.”

“My dear Audrey,” retorted her brother, “the most miraculous thing about miracles is that they are always happening.”

Audrey sniffed.

“That’s not original, Robert,” she told him.

John Carlton, the oldest of the children, and decidedly the most concerned of those in the dressing-room, walked toward the door of his father’s bedroom and peered at it anxiously and rather hopelessly. His features resembled those of his mother; they were reassuring at first glance. His eyes were kindly, and his lips were pleasantly curved. The hair at his temples was gray in spots. He had told none of the others that he had been in constant communication with the house on Porchester Terrace during the past forty-eight hours by telegraph or telephone. A vital development in Sir

John's business affairs had, in fact, kept him rushing from one city to another, without chance for sleep during the short trips.

He returned to the side of his brother, who had risen and stood by the fireplace.

"The only hope, it seems to me," he said quietly, "is in father's amazing constitution. He might pull through a crisis like this where a dozen men of his age would go under."

"Well, to be perfectly frank——" began Audrey, who felt called upon to say something.

"Oh, Lord," groaned Robert. "More from the family oracle."

"To be perfectly frank," she continued, with an angry look at her brother, "it's not father I'm worrying about so much as dear mother."

"Poor darling," agreed Lady Lessington, "she looks absolutely worn out."

"Well, you wouldn't wonder at it, if you'd been here last week and seen the tyranny exercised in the sick-room," retorted Audrey.

Lady Lessington shrugged her shoulders.

"But invalids are always exacting," insisted John.

"Nonsense. It's father's will to be exacting, sick or well," Audrey returned.

“Oh, for Heaven’s sake, Audrey——” broke in John.

Audrey was very complacent. She had always been well nourished and self-satisfied, and she prided herself on her indifference to the opinions of others, particularly members of the family. She regarded with pitying disdain even John’s lack of appreciation of the events that she had so carefully observed.

“He’s simply made a slave of mother,” she cried vehemently. “Just a little slave! Two nurses, and neither of them allowed to do a hand’s turn for him if he could help it! Mother must fetch and carry; mother must feed him; mother must sit with him; mother must hold his hand. If she was ever away for five minutes, it was always, ‘Mary, come here; I want you.’”

“Well,” suggested John, “that’s not such a bad thing for a woman to hear, if you ask me.” He looked at his sister with a half-smile of inquiry.

Audrey looked at him scornfully.

“All his life it’s been the same,” she said, her eyes blazing. “She’s always been his slave.”

“Just the fault of her generation, my dear,” explained Lady Lessington tolerantly.



“Women of her time simply didn’t know how to manage life.”

“I dare say,” agreed Audrey. “All the same, it makes my blood boil to see her wearing herself away to a shadow. It isn’t as if he’d been, from any point of view, a model husband, or——”

“Really, Audrey,” objected John, “this doesn’t seem to me to be the time to bring up poor old dad’s shortcomings.”

His sister shook her head in perplexity.

“Women have very little sense of decency in these matters,” remarked Robert decisively.

“Thank you, dear Robert,” said Lady Lessington, with a weary smile. “Still, Audrey,” she continued, “it’s a waste of energy and perfectly useless to get so hot and angry about all this.”

John shook his head uncomprehendingly when he saw that his younger sister was about to continue her arguments, but turned when he heard the door of the sick-room open softly. Dr. Arbuthnot appeared, closed the door, and placed in their proper position the portières through which he had just come. Then, with a sigh, he joined Sir John Carlton’s children.



“Ah! All of you still here?” he remarked, glancing about him.

He was an elderly man whom one would immediately recognize as eminent, whether statesman, barrister or physician. He revealed in every move and word, as well as in his distinguished appearance, the best traditions of generations of Englishmen. This late afternoon his face had deep lines that had been accentuated by hours without sleep. His eyes were bright, and his lips curved in the expected hopeful smile of the doctor. His poise was very exact; he was deadly tired, but no one must know it.

“Well, Doctor?” inquired John, passing a silver box filled with cigarettes and, as the physician nodded it away, taking one himself and lighting it nervously.

Dr. Arbuthnot scanned the faces of the four children of the man whom he was trying to help to live. The women, he noticed casually, had risen as he came into the room, and had put down their cigarettes. He was pleased at that, for Sir John Carlton was one of his friends. He understood now, he thought, how much their father really meant to them below the surface of their seeming nonchalance.

"I'm afraid I haven't anything very definite to tell you," he admitted regretfully. "An hour ago Sir Gilbert and I thought that we saw signs that Sir John was yielding to the treatment. But now—I can't tell. I can't tell. Please don't worry, my boy," he urged, turning to John, whose eyelids had closed at the non-committal announcement. "Everything may—should—be for the best."

"There still is—hope?" faltered Lady Lessington, deeply impressed when she, like John, had guessed the discouragement behind Dr. Arbuthnot's guarded assurances.

"Hope, of course, dear lady. But I'm afraid the probabilities are against recovery," he finally admitted. He paused for a moment, as though to weigh carefully his words. "I'm sorry—very sorry—to distress you, but it's best to be quite frank."

"Has he been conscious?" inquired Robert.

"In snatches," the physician answered. "He always knew Lady Carlton."

"And how is mother keeping up?" inquired Audrey.

"Wonderfully," he answered, "though I want her to rest. She must rest. But I doubt if she can be persuaded to do so until she has





*A First National Picture.*

HER SECRET LOVE AFFAIR DISCOVERED BY HER FATHER.

*Secrets.*





some sort of certainty about him. I'm going to bring her in here to that arm-chair, within earshot of his room. You had better leave her to me."

"It's been a tremendous strain for the poor darling," said Lady Lessington sympathetically.

"Of course," agreed Dr. Arbuthnot.

"And all through," pursued Audrey emphatically, "she has indulged his slightest whim at any expense to herself."

The doctor turned abruptly towards her, then smiled and agreed again, "Ah! Of course."

Audrey must have noticed the minute change from Dr. Arbuthnot's usual suave demeanor, for she persisted:

"Yes—but she could consider herself a little even if father won't consider her."

"My dear Miss Carlton," protested the doctor, "I doubt if you can quite enter into your mother's feelings."

"My sister," remarked John with an ironical grin, "has very definite views on the sex question."

"She's a very great student of Freud," amended Lady Lessington.

"Freud?" asked the doctor, rather non-plussed. "Dear me! Dear me!"

"And, darling," inquired Lady Lessington in saccharine tones, "didn't you lecture on love and marriage—and all that kind of thing?"

"There's no such thing as love," returned Audrey with decision. "It's only the sex complex in the brain."

"Is that so?" began the doctor rather angrily. His features changed suddenly, and he smiled again. "I should like to hear your mother lecture on marriage—and the sex complex on the brain," he said.

"Mother! On marriage?" she asked pityingly. "Poor, poor mother."

"Poor, darling little mummy," reiterated Lady Lessington. "But I tell sister, Doctor, that there's no use judging the past generation by ourselves on such a question as marriage. Their views are so hopelessly different from ours."

Dr. Arbuthnot smiled again, not tolerantly, because he knew that such a smile would be resented, but rather expectantly, as though to pave the way for what he was to say.

"I am an old man, dear lady," he began, "and in my profession I see marriage in all its

aspects. I see it alive, and I see it dead. I see it beautiful, and I see it ugly. I see it battered, and I see it whole, and I really know nothing about it. For every separate marriage is a separate mystery. Men and women come to doctors, and they tell them secrets about marriage. But the innermost secrets they never tell. They couldn't if they tried, for in every marriage there are secrets that only one man and one woman know—only one man and one woman!”

He smiled again gently, and this time tolerantly.

“Now,” he resumed, “I’m going to bring Lady Carlton in here, and I want to ask you not to worry her with questions or advice or attentions. Please just leave her to me.”

“Certainly, Doctor,” agreed John.

“Thank God!” said Audrey, as the doctor went into the bedroom. “Mother will get some rest at last.”

The doctor left the bedroom door open, and in a few moments Mary Carlton pushed aside the portières and came into the dressing-room. She looked around her, taking in her sons and daughters at a glance.

“My children,” she whispered.

She was seventy-three years old. Her hair,



almost white, was as billowy as that of either of her daughters. Her face was wholly beautiful. Even youth would have stopped to look at it and marvel at the perfect features, the deep gleaming eyes, the full lips that had never faded. Her skin had not the charm of that of a woman of more tender years, yet it was smooth and soft—one could see that. And there were wrinkles, deepened now by hours of wakefulness, but still soft as roses. On her weary face there came a smile, forced, because she was unhappy and so tired, yet a smile of love for the man she had just left and for her children who were before her.

She fixed her eyes on John, her “big boy,” who had tinges of gray in his hair.

“Johnny, dear,” she cried.

“Mother, dear.” He went to meet her.

Her lips quavered, then relapsed in the smile which she had always worn for those she loved.

“There’s no change—yet,” she said.

“No, dear, but there’s hope,” John replied.

The mother brushed her hand across her face; her eyes filled with tears, but she bravely winked them away.

“Yes,” she admitted, “we must go on hoping, mustn’t we?”

Dr. Arbuthnot coughed, twirled the ends of his mustache, and assumed his most professional manner.

“Lady Carlton,” he said.

“Yes, Doctor.”

“You are going to sit down in this cozy arm-chair and close your eyes and try to rest yourself.” He led her to it. “And now, Lady Carlton,” he went on, still bristling his mustache, and with all the pompousness of a newly accredited physician on one of his first cases, “I’m going to turn your family out.”

“Yes, Doctor,” agreed Mary Carlton. She sat down, and her eyelids closed. She opened them again with an effort, and asked, “But you’ll see that the door is kept a little ajar?”

“Yes, yes, dear lady; yes, yes! But you know he’s still unconscious and——”

“But,” she broke in feverishly, “if he regains consciousness and—and calls me—and I don’t hear him——! He’s always had me near him—and you will leave the door open?”

Audrey was about to speak, but Lady Lessington silenced her with a nod.

“Wouldn’t you rest better,” she suggested, “if the door——”

“No! No! I couldn’t rest at all if the door were shut.”

“But really, Mother,” insisted Audrey.

“Doctor,” cried Lady Carlton appealingly.

“It shall be as you wish,” he said quietly.

“But if I fall asleep, as I may—for I’m so tired—you’ll wake me if he wants me, won’t you?”

“I promise I’ll wake you the moment he needs you,” Dr. Arbuthnot assured her.

“Thank you. Thank you.”

She fell back in her chair, obviously exhausted.

“You’ll let us know at once if——” whispered John, as he started, at the doctor’s order, to turn out some of the lights.

“Yes, yes,” said Arbuthnot.

“We’ll be in the drawing-room,” said Lady Lessington.

Lady Carlton’s four children went quietly to the other room. Two lights remained burning. As the doctor was about to turn them out and leave the room, Mary Carlton opened her eyes.

“Yes, John,” she said.

“Now, Lady Carlton,” protested the doctor with emphasis, “that is the one thing that you must not do. Sir John doesn’t want you, and



won't want you for some time yet. You simply must close your eyes and relax your body and mind; otherwise, when he really wants you, you'll not be fit to go to him. Please accept my advice on this matter."

"Thank you, Doctor," Mary answered. "I'll do exactly as you say. Do go back to Sir John and let me know when I am needed."

"Dear lady, I thank you. It has been nearly eighteen hours since you have slept, and if I have another patient on my hands I'm afraid that I shall have to call back Sir Gilbert and myself attend to you. But now you assure me that I can return to Sir John with an easy mind. And I should prefer to close the door."

"Yes, Doctor," she said, with a smile.

He went through the door and closed it softly after looking back and seeing that Lady Carlton's lids were closed.

A few moments passed. She nodded and suddenly was wide awake.

"Yes, John; please call for me again," she whispered.

She walked softly to the door of the bedroom and heard only the vague consultation of doctor and nurses. Then she tiptoed back to a desk, opened it, and took from a small upper



drawer a book with yellowed pages, bound in leather that was worn and wrinkled. It was half-locked by brass hinges that snapped against protruding clasps on the outer cover.

As she sat down in the arm-chair, the glow of the reading lamp fell softly on the marred leather surface of her volume. Her face lost its tired expression and gleamed with the happiness of remembrance.

So many years ago, when she was a girl, she had read somewhere a beautiful story of married life, and from it had evolved her own philosophy of marriage. Every man and woman who had "become one," as she had then adopted the expression, had their secrets which they never could share with another, but which each cherished as sacred things, forbidden to all the rest of the world. Even the beautiful memories were rarely discussed; those which were unfortunate never came between them after the climax had been reached, but themselves were never forgotten.

All such matters, the young girl had decided, must be a bond between husband and wife, a bond that, as the pleasant incidents became recollections, and the unhappy were forgiven,

should become stronger as their links, of fine or lesser metal, became more numerous. The treasures of which no one else could partake would be the richest, she had decided. She had waited for the coming of her lover; she had never thought to place her inmost confidences in writing until she knew that she was in love and could then selfishly chronicle the things that no one else must know or understand.

The worn leather book which Lady Carlton had before her told the secrets known only to her and the man who lay inside the bedroom dying. She had always regarded it as a precious thing, and the ink that was dim on the first pages grew darker as it marked the passing of years. Each line brought memories; sometime to-night she might be forced to write the words which would bring the book to a close—but no, she told herself desperately. That never must happen!

She fondled the pages, kissed them, and began to read. She saw the shy admission with which the journal began, “I have met Mr. John Carlton.” Then she recalled the circumstances which had immediately preceded that inscription, and as she turned the age-mottled leaves,

she saw herself again as a girl of eighteen trying vainly to express with a quill pen the infinite eloquence of a first love.

Page after page—each brought its delightful heartache. She was rapt in happiness when her eyes finally closed.



## CHAPTER ONE

THE Marlowe estate at Blackheath was one of the many show-places of the suburban section of London; in fact, there were so many beautiful country seats available for inspection even in 1865 that no one paid much attention to any of them. There was a vast expanse of lawn that, thanks to England's almost constant rain, was perpetually green. Rhododendrons flanked the driveway in regular masses, though here and there were laburnums and lilacs to break the uniformity of the colorful hedge.

As one looked from the main road, above the high wall that surrounded the estate, he saw the grim manor house, enlivened in summer by streamers of ivy which seemed to reach to all parts of the building, enveloping it in a glossy covering. When the weather was fair, peacocks stalked majestically on the great lawn, and always pigeons darted here and there, returning now and then to the dovecote before the front door and cooing pleasantly as they scampered along the eaves.



Mary Marlowe's bedroom windows looked down upon the pool and the rose-garden directly behind the house and separated by a flagstone walk which led to a rear gateway. She often sat there, at the door which opened upon the tiled terrace of the second story, and marvelled at the wonders before her. Sometimes she was sorry that the gardeners had been so precise as they clipped the hedges, and cared for the roses which were placed in such studied disorder. She liked the lilies in the pool. Their mottled pads came up here and there, and the white blossoms burst through the surface of the water and raised themselves without regard for horticultural formulæ. The horse-chestnut trees, which bloomed so regularly at the entrance of the drive, and which bloomed just as regularly, but apparently with more abandon at the back of the house, by the service entrance at the left, also intrigued her. In the front, they seemed so formal. They blossomed, and before long shed their burrs and nuts along the gravel drive, and on the grass. The gardeners religiously raked or picked them up.

But at the rear of the house, the burrs and horse-chestnuts were sometimes forgotten.

They stayed there for a day or two, and Mary, as a girl, had often picked up the chestnuts and hoarded them. Even now there was a box of them in the desk in which was carefully locked her diary and other precious possessions. She did not want the horse-chestnuts any longer; their skins were shriveled, and the chestnuts rattled like peas in a tin dish. But she had never been able to throw them away when she decided upon a rather infrequent "house-cleaning." They were something that had been overlooked in the course of the strict Marlowe régime; and she cherished them for that.

Twice a week, at this time of year, the gardeners opened the gates of the poultry houses, though they were on the lookout lest any of the proud mothers stray to the front lawn with their chicks. Mary watched them as they pecked at the lilies of the valley and scurried on disdainfully. She delighted in seeing a mother duck gravely escort her progeny to the pool, and urge them to try the water.

Mary knew that she was too old to delight in such things. She had just passed her eighteenth birthday, and in this age of the good Queen Victoria, one of her years must begin to think

of the more serious things of life, such as special functions where one might become acquainted with a possible husband; of marriage, before many years; and all that went with marriage, such as rearing fine sons and daughters, who would do credit to the family line and to the Empire.

She sat there, looking out at the rose-garden and the pool, utterly happy. She anticipated the darkness, when she would see the shadow which she had come to know so well come hesitantly along the flags, and linger under the balcony.

Her dream vanished, however, when she remembered that she must go to the ball at a neighboring manor with her mother and Aunt Eliza, and even the thought of the exquisite new dress which had been obtained especially for the evening failed to dispel her overwhelming sense of disappointment. It was her first ball and the greatest of the season in Blackheath—but she sighed as she realized that she had been forced to postpone a rendezvous which to her was much more important.

She went to her desk, and sat down in the light of two sputtering candles. After she had taken a glossy, leather-colored book from the



drawer, she opened it and turned a few pages until she came to one that was blank. Then she dipped the quill in the ink and began to write. Her eyes wandered here and there as she paused thoughtfully after each sentence and her lips curved upward in a smile as she tried to express in words the momentous thoughts which caused the throbbing of her heart.

She hardly noticed Susan, her unattractive but most satisfactory maid, who came into the room with tapers to light the other candles. She wrote on blissfully, until she noticed a shadow over her book. Then, following an impish idea, she continued, "And I could tell my diary so much more about my darling John if Susan were not standing behind me, reading this."

"Why, I wasn't reading it," asserted Susan quickly, before a word had been spoken.

Mary laughed.

"You wouldn't understand if you did, Susan," she declared. "Tell me, have you ever been in love?"

"No—not yet, that is, Miss," the maid stammered hopefully. "But I think I understand what—why Miss Mary is writing."



“And what would you do, Susan, if you were really in love?” her mistress pursued.

“I suppose”—Susan shifted in embarrassment from one foot to the other—“that I’d be—in love just like you are, Miss Mary. But isn’t it time to dress, Miss?” she suggested, hopeful of a diversion from the delicate subject.

“It must be,” sighed Mary, closing her diary, and locking carefully the drawer in which she replaced it.

Mary Carlton’s room was great in size, and virginal in its every aspect. The wall had paper with dainty flowers, pink and white, and there hung pictures of a sacred character and illuminated texts.

On the four-poster bed were the crinoline, dress, bouquet, gloves and wreath.

“It will be a grand party—that you are going to, to-night,” said Susan, as she went to the bed and touched fussily the crinoline and smoothed the dress itself.

“Grand?” inquired Mary Marlowe, a little absently. “Yes, Susan. Yes! I imagine so.”

Mary Marlowe was marvelously beautiful. Black hair, red full lips, impressed one first. But in a moment one saw deep, dark eyes,

which were almost ready to give forth tears—and for no reason at all. They gleamed, and as the lids flickered one saw pools of emotion. Something fiery! Something that made man wonder at the beauty of woman. Yes, it must have been her eyes.

Slender as a Daphne! Yet as unconscious of her charms as could be any daughter of a complacent English house in the decorous Mid-Victorian era.

“I heard the mistress telling Miss Channing yesterday——” began Susan, as she started to do up Miss Mary’s hair.

“Shh! Shh!” whispered Mary excitedly. “Wasn’t that the postman’s knock?”

“No, Miss Mary,” answered Susan, deftly beginning to arrange the elaborate coiffure. “That was only the scullery door slamming.”

“Open the door, please,” directed the young lady, “and leave it ajar. Then we shall be certain to hear.”

“Yes, Miss Mary,” replied the maid, opening the door and returning to her work. “But, oh, Miss Mary, dear, doesn’t your ’eart go all of a flutter at this time of the evening when you’re expecting the young gentleman’s ‘billy-doos’!”



## CHAPTER TWO

SUSAN dropped the coils of hair for an instant and stood before the simple dressing table in ecstasy of anticipation. Her plain face beamed and she touched languishingly the bared shoulder of her mistress. How could any man help but love her? And the man who did love her was such a handsome young gentleman! How wonderful it was to be the messenger of love! Susan could hardly control herself. She wished at the instant that she could sing beautifully—or write wonderful verses of love—or something.

“Susan!” said Mary Marlowe.

“Yes, Miss,” Susan replied, taking up again the coils of her mistress’s hair.

“I’m getting more and more uneasy,” the young lady said, “at having drawn you into—all this.”

“No, Miss,” objected Susan, as she energetically busied herself again with the curls. “You didn’t draw me into it. I came to your ’elp all on my own, and with a willing ’eart. When I saw ’ow you and the gentleman were



taken with each other, the way 'e's met us again and again when you and me was out shopping—and the way I've seen him often of a night standing outside the 'ouse, or even getting into the garden to look up at your window—and the way you'd blush ali rosy when you saw 'im——”

Susan threw up her hands and went to the bed for the wreath.

“Yes, Susan, I know,” put in Mary hastily, “but what I mean is that——”

“Yes, Miss?”

“Oh, you see, Susan, I'm deceiving Mamma and Papa in having anything to do with Mr. Carlton. It's very wrong of me, I'm sure; at least, I suppose that it is. I—I don't know—but I do know that I should never have allowed you to become a partner to my deception. That really was wrong.”

“But, Miss,” said Susan in protest.

“And I don't think that it ought to go on,” pursued Mary emphatically.

“But, Miss Mary,” returned Susan in consternation, “what'll you and Mr. Carlton do without me?”

“I don't know,” was the girl's helpless answer.

“And you won’t ever be able to meet him, Miss Mary,” said Susan anxiously. “You must have your maid with you, for if you can’t meet the gentleman with me, you can’t meet him at all.”

“Yes, Susan,” Mary replied wearily. “I know.”

Susan became almost hysterical.

“And your ‘billy-doos,’ Miss. If Mr. Carlton doesn’t send them to you, addressed to me, how are you to get them? Your pa and ma would soon ‘ave suspicions if they saw letters coming for you every day. They’d know that something that shouldn’t was going on.”

“I know, Susan, but still——”

“Oh, you can’t mean it,” protested the maid. “You can’t mean it; you really can’t. It would break your ‘eart not to meet the young gentleman, nor even to ‘ear from ‘im. Don’t think of me, Miss. I just love ‘elping you, and——”

“I know you do, Susan, and it’s so good of you. But when a thing’s wrong——”

She rose from the chair of her dressing table, and looked appealingly at her maid. Suddenly there came the postman’s whistle and his knock at the service door.

“There!” she cried immediately. “That was the post.”

“Yes, Miss,” said Susan, her normally restive state becoming more and more agitated. “And shall I——”

“Please do,” Mary ordered her; “run down and fetch the letter for me—just this once.”

Susan beamed, placed an appreciative hand over her heart, and ran from the room. Nightly, as the evening post stopped at the house, Susan conjured herself as love’s messenger and sometimes, in the secrecy of the dark rear hallway, placed the love-letters tenderly against her cheek. She had never had a real love affair of her own, though some of the tradesmen’s boys had occasionally rolled their eyes at her, but the paper-covered books which she read diligently assured her that her “noble youth” would one day come to claim her. Consequently, there was not the slightest taint of bitterness or jealousy in her mind as she connived with her younger mistress in this love affair. Susan had peeked at Mary’s diary, and had reveled in the ardent glances that had always come when the lovers met, just before the maid retired from the spot to wait, a few yards away. To her, this experience of Mary, of



whom she had become very fond, was the prototype of that which would follow a chance encounter with her own "noble youth."

Susan had hardly reached the rear hallway before Mrs. Marlowe, and her unmarried sister, Eliza Channing, of about the same age, came from the front of the house. Mrs. Marlowe, as was customary, was talking in vigorous tones. There was no doubt in the small community in which they lived that she was an overpowering influence in the Marlowe household, even though her husband was an important figure in the banking world, and went to his London counting-house almost every day.

Blackheath, seven miles southeast of Charing Cross, was then, as it is now, one of London's important suburbs. It comprised a group of attractive manor-houses, surrounded by extensive grounds, whose owners were men of independent means, or those whose business successes permitted the time required for the long and leisurely trip to and from the city.

Mrs. Marlowe's features were not pleasing. The lines of her face had manifestly come from frowns and the prominent lines about her mouth had not been so deepened by pleasant smiles.

Her sister, however, was a strange contrast.



One knew at once that she was almost as old as Mrs. Marlowe, yet there was something about her features that was infinitely sweet and appealing. The tiny, consistent wrinkles were premature; they had been caused by some sorrow and had been deftly molded into softness by something else—perhaps beautiful memory. Her natural, appealing smile was always encouraging, especially if one were young and very much in love. In fact, she had always been a favorite of the children in Mary's younger days, and as the girls and boys became older, a confidante of the tremendous problems and sorrows of youth. In the house of Marlowe, however, she shared with him the status of a satellite, although her rank was considerably below his.

"It's always the way," asserted Mrs. Marlowe, as she approached with determined steps her daughter's room. "Whenever I want anything, I'm invariably kept waiting."

"Well, Sister," protested Miss Channing mildly, "you can't say that I was not ready."

Mary, sitting before her mirror in a reverie, and thinking only of the letter which Susan would soon bring to her, was terrified at the

sound of her mother's voice. She snatched up her wreath and placed it quickly on her head. When the two women entered the room, she was calmly adjusting it, though inwardly panic-stricken.

"Mamma," she faltered.

"What, child—not ready yet?" asked the mother, sweeping the room with a glance. "And where is Susan?" she inquired abruptly.

"She went downstairs to fetch something," Mary replied, very frightened, but quite mistress of herself.

"Went downstairs to fetch something! And in the middle of dressing you? And here I am, in my poor state of health, with nobody to help me dress but your incompetent Aunt Eliza."

"I assure you, sister," remarked Miss Channing, with some show of spirit, "that it was no pleasure for me to lace you into that ridiculous dress."

"My dress is not ridiculous," bridled Mrs. Marlowe.

"Opinions differ, Sister," observed Miss Channing sweetly.

Susan rushed into the room, panting, two letters in her hand.

“What’s the meaning of this?” demanded Mrs. Marlowe angrily.

“Of what?” inquired Susan very guiltily. “Please, ma’am, I—I went downstairs to fetch something.”

Mary braced herself to face the worst; she looked pleadingly towards Susan.

“Fetch something,” snapped Mrs. Marlowe. “What was it?”

“A letter, ma’am,” the maid admitted.

“A letter? For Miss Mary?” asked Mrs. Marlowe.

“Oh, no, ma’am,” said Susan, the acme of innocence, and so ridiculous in her attempt to give a false impression that it was eminently successful. “No, it was from my mother—for me. It was about my poor little sick brother.”

She went towards the bed, and picked up the gloves which Miss Mary was to wear that evening. She placed them carefully on the dressing table, and, seeing that the eyes of Mrs. Marlowe and Miss Channing were no longer upon her, hastily put under the pillow of the bed the letters which she had so ostentatiously tried to hide when she came into the room.

Mary Marlowe stood before the mirror for



a moment, and then turned towards her mother.

“Is my hair all right—Mamma?” she asked.

She gave Susan a glance that was at once grateful and at the same time incredulous. She could not, and she certainly would not, have lied so perfectly. She was extremely happy that attention had been diverted from “Susan’s letter,” yet, after all, it had not been exactly right for Susan to tell an untruth to the mistress of the manor. In fact, it was almost wrong. Yes, it really was wrong!

Miss Channing smiled. Mary believed at once that her aunt had seen the entire proceeding of deception, and that she knew—everything.

“Your hair,” the spinster told her niece, “is perfectly lovely to-night, darling.”

Mrs. Marlowe had been inspecting her daughter’s coiffure; her head bobbed from one side to the other.

“Pray allow me, Eliza,” she said in tones of severe correction. “Pull the first curl on the left a little lower,” she directed Susan. “There, that’s better.”

“Not that we shall ever make much of Miss Mary’s hair,” she continued. “I can’t think,



child, where you ever got that dreadfully crude color from. It certainly never came from my side of the family," she concluded with emphasis.

"All the modern artists greatly admire that color of hair," suggested Mrs. Marlowe's sister.

Mary gave her a grateful look and, since her aunt was several feet away, proceeded to squeeze Susan's hand most affectionately.

"The best modern artists?" inquired the girl's mother. "Are you, by any chance, alluding to that set of irreligious, immoral young men who call themselves the something-or-other brotherhood?"

"I've never heard of the 'something-or-other brotherhood,' " returned Miss Channing. "I was alluding to the pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood—including Mr. Millais, Mr. Rossetti, Mr.——"

"Eliza! Please!" cautioned Mrs. Marlowe sharply. "Not in my daughter's bedroom. Susan, adjust the wreath," she added with a toss of her head.

Susan fussed with it for a moment, then drew back to see the effect.

“Miss Mary,” she cried. “How lovely——”

“Susan,” rebuked Mrs. Marlowe.

“Yes, ma’am,” Susan said, hastily stepping away from her mistress.

Mrs. Marlowe drew back and looked critically at her daughter. Susan stood almost spellbound, and Miss Channing was frank in her admiration.

“Oh!” she exclaimed, “a wreath on a young girl is so lovely. There’s nothing lovelier.”

“Hum, the wreath seems to suit the child well enough,” Mrs. Marlowe half admitted. “Now, Susan, the hoops.”

“Yes, ma’am,” said Susan, moving out of an apparant trance and going to the bed for the crinoline.

Mary stood up and slipped off her dressing-gown. She seemed rather embarrassed as she stood there before her mother, aunt and maid. Her bare shoulders were soft and white. Susan brought the intricate crinoline from the bed and deftly whisked it over the girl’s head. It stood out grotesquely beyond her white, silk petticoat, yet its band neatly fitted Mary’s trim waist.

“Hold yourself up, my dear,” urged her

mother. "Miss Fothergill should have given you longer with the back-board. I always said it. A most genteel woman, but lax——"

"And a perfect fool, if you ask me," volunteered Miss Channing.

"I did not ask you, Eliza," said Mrs. Marlowe. She twitched here and there at a flounce, while Susan, kneeling, pulled out the hem of the young lady's petticoat. Miss Channing sat observingly on the ottoman. "Genteel, but lax," pursued Mrs. Marlowe slowly. "I should have preferred your going to Miss Merriam's. But your dear Papa insisted on Miss Fothergill's School, for all his sisters had finished there. Now, Mary, hold yourself up. Stand erect, my dear."

"Yes, Mamma," said Mary, holding herself up and standing as straight as a private at military inspection.

"That's better," sighed the mother. "I really should like to show Papa to-night how well you can look—considering"—she stopped speaking to decide what would be the correct thing to say—"considering," she went on finally, "considering that you are no beauty, and never will be one. Now, your foot, my love."

The girl obediently stretched forth her right foot, which was at once enclosed in a dainty pink satin slipper. Then her mother helped her with her left slipper.

“Yes, that will do,” she admitted with Victorian reluctance, “feet, like faces, are facts that cannot be altered.”

“But Mary takes a size smaller than you ever did, Sister,” observed Miss Channing.

“Your memory must be failing,” Mrs. Marlowe replied curtly. “Susan, the dress, now.”





## CHAPTER THREE

SUSAN went again to the bed and, assisted by Mrs. Marlowe, lifted the dress from it. Mary watched them, with dreamy ecstatic eyes. The dress which had been chosen by the impeccable Mrs. Marlowe was of delicate pink silk, trimmed with yards and yards of exquisite lace flounces which were caught up at intervals with tiny clusters of pink rosebuds and lovers' knots of pale blue ribbon. The tight fitting bodice, pointed in front, was of the pink silk, and the dropped shoulder effect was made by a bertha of lace outlined with rosebuds.

"Oh, isn't it lovely?" she breathed.

"Fit for a queen, Miss Mary," agreed Susan spontaneously.

"Susan," said Mrs. Marlowe sharply. "You were not spoken to. Yes, indeed, it is pretty," she went on, turning towards her sister and then back to her daughter. "And a pretty penny it cost, too. I don't know what your Papa will say when he sees the account. And are you sure, Susan, that you've laced Miss Mary tightly enough?"

“Yes, ma’am,” said Susan, as she took Mary’s dressing jacket from the floor and put it in the wardrobe.

Mrs. Marlowe was devout in her inspection of Mary’s waistline.

“I believe,” she pondered, “that I could take in another inch, my love. Yes—I’m sure that I can.” She untied the knot that loosened the many inches of laces, pulled vigorously at the strings, and then refastened them, unmindful of Mary’s physical anguish.

“There is nothing like a small waist to win admiration,” she asserted. “Proper admiration—as I have always told you. There now!”

She stood back to study the effect, while Susan hooked up her mistress in the back.

“Yes, it’s a beautiful fit,” she continued critically; “a beautiful fit. And I’m glad that I insisted on my lace for the sleeves. You see, Eliza,” she went on, turning towards her sister, “those little cascades go very well. Very sweet, are they not?”

Miss Channing got up. Any one could see the intense admiration in her eyes. She went over to Mary, kissed her, and looked at her languishingly.

“My darling!” she cried. “My beautiful darling!”

“Oh, Auntie,” asked Mary, “do I really look nice?”

“Your dress, my child, is most becoming,” said Mrs. Marlowe decisively.

This was Mary’s first party dress. Incidentally, it was the first time that Mrs. Marlowe had allowed her young daughter to wear a dress with the fashionable décolleté neck-line, which exposed Mary’s white, rounded shoulders and a firm young bosom in all their beauty.

Mrs. Marlowe, outwardly the stern mentor of her daughter’s decorum and demeanor, felt an inward glow of complacent pride that Mary should have attained womanhood with such perfection. She marshaled like lightning all sorts of plans for brilliant match-making, each of which, one after the other, came to a happy conclusion in her busy and capable mind.

“The fashions have changed,” interjected Miss Channing, “but this dress reminds me of the one I wore when I came out. Don’t you remember it, Sister?”

Mrs. Marlowe paid the scant attention of a “yes, yes, yes,” and continued her strict scrutiny of Mary’s attire.



“Now, Mary,” she suggested, “a pretty ankle is never indecorous to show, and it should not always be hidden from rich and aristocratic young men. Now, as you curtsey you could very properly do this.” She lifted Mary’s dress an inch above her perfect ankle, and her daughter obediently looked down to note the presumably chaste but enticing effect. “And as you dance, Mary,” her mother went on, “there will be opportunities for you to show your pretty ankle—and you need not have the slightest chagrin. Like this, for instance——”

She stood away from Mary, leaped ungracefully from one foot to the other, and with practiced hand raised her dress from the floor at each caper to exactly the proper margin above her rather bulky ankles. Her face bore a look of stern complacency.

Miss Channing giggled, and her sister turned to stare at her inquiringly. “Put on your gloves, my dear,” Mrs. Marlowe ordered her daughter.

Mary started carefully to pull on her long gloves.

“And was your dress so pretty, Auntie?” she asked, returning to Miss Channing’s spoken memory of a moment ago.

“Susan,” interrupted Mrs. Marlowe, not meaning to break in, but all intent on the dressing operation, “does the waist seem at all loose now?”

“No, ma’am; it fits like a glove,” said Susan emphatically.

“My dress!” resumed Miss Channing eagerly. “Yes, darling, yes! It was lovely, with Mamma’s liking for the flounces caught up with the rosebuds. Of course, you remember, Sister.”

Again Mrs. Marlowe did not mean to be unkind to her sister, but she was still very intent on Mary.

“Yes,” she asserted, “and I remember your beau, who called the next afternoon, and how dear Mamma disapproved. Now, Susan, the handkerchief, please.”

She acted before Susan, and herself picked up the handkerchief. Miss Channing’s eyes lost their sparkle of the moment, and she became her normal spinsterish self.

“Hold the handkerchief so, my love,” illustrated Mrs. Marlowe, “so that the lace will show.”

Mary took it, looking carefully at the lace, and said, “Yes, Mamma.”

“And the bouquet,” demanded her mother. “Susan, where is the bouquet?”

Susan quickly fetched a tiny bunch of delicate flowers from the bed and pinned it on Miss Mary’s bodice.

“Very good,” remarked Mrs. Marlowe, on seeing the ensemble of her daughter’s evening costume. “Very good, indeed, my dear.”

“Damn it, James,” came a voice from the corridor, as a door slammed.

“Ah, here’s Papa,” said Mrs. Marlowe. “He’s just in the nick of time to see us before we go.”

She walked towards the door and heard another door slam violently.

“Oh, dear, oh, dear,” she murmured. “He always slams the door like that when he is in a perfect temper. I’m afraid something has put him out.”

“I wish something would,” said Miss Channing. “It’s about time that he became interested in something besides that office of his.”

“Eliza!” rebuked Mrs. Marlowe.

“Very well, Sister,” she retorted. She went to Mary, who was standing near the almost petrified Susan, and put her arm lovingly around the waist of her niece.

“Darling,” she whispered, “I’m going to tell you a secret. Your dress is very lovely—but you’re much lovelier than your dress.”

“Auntie!” returned Mary delightedly.

“And you’ll be the belle of the ball,” Miss Channing went on, “and all the gentlemen will fall in love with you. Gracious,” she said suddenly, “here comes your father. And in what a temper!”

“I want to see my daughter,” boomed a voice.

The door of Mary’s bedroom was flung open, and her father rushed in. The girl stood before him rather defiantly; she realized what was to come. Susan’s intuition had caused her to run to the far side of the bed. But both Mrs. Marlowe and Miss Channing were gravely perplexed.

“Well, Miss,” thundered Marlowe, confronting his daughter.

He was the pompous, successful English banker.

Frequently he banged the doors of his house, and very often he spoke tartly to Miss Channing. He also made pertinent remarks to the servants on occasion, though he usually left



such outbursts to his better qualified wife. Miss Channing observed privately that her brother-in-law slammed doors and spoke harshly to servants because, when his digestion was none too good, he had the good sense not to try to make life uncomfortable for his wife.

None of the women, however, had ever seen him in such a state of temper. His "mutton-chop" whiskers bristled angrily; his gray eyes snapped. He glared at the four women in the room, concentrating his gaze momentarily on his daughter.

"Oh, William," cried Mrs. Marlowe, "what has she done?" Her voice became a wail.

He paused, his eyes flashing malignantly.

"Your daughter," he said finally, "has disgraced us all, Alice."

It was the superb moment of his twenty years of married life. Now he was dominant.

"Disgrace!" cried Mrs. Marlowe. "No! No!"

"She has disgraced us all," he declared, frowning at the girl who stood immovable before her dresser.

Miss Channing stepped between Marlowe and his daughter.



*A First National Picture.*

*Secrets.*

"WE ARE GOING TO AMERICA, MARY."





“I’m sure,” she protested quietly, “that Mary has done nothing of the sort.”

Marlowe waved her away.

“Miss Channing, stand aside,” he demanded. In spite of her temerity, she obeyed his order. “I know everything,” the father said solemnly, walking with clenched fists towards Mary, who stood silent and motionless.

“Oh, William, what is it? Tell us all about it,” urged his wife wildly.

“Your daughter, Alice,” began Marlowe, with a successful attempt to place thunder in his voice, “has been grossly and systematically deceiving her parents. She has entered into a disgraceful entanglement——”

“Dear me,” moaned Mrs. Marlowe.

“There have been meetings—letters—promises. Do you dare deny it, Miss?”

Mary shook her head.

“No, Papa,” she whispered.

“Be silent,” he thundered on, almost before the words were out of her lips.

“And who is it, William; who is the man?” asked the now curious Mrs. Marlowe.

“It’s young Carlton,” he replied.

“Mary! Oh! Mary!” Mrs. Marlowe wished that she had brought her smelling salts to her



daughter's room. "A mere clerk in your father's office."

"A clerk," said Mary, breathlessly but courageously, "but not a m-mere clerk."

"Hold your tongue, Miss," interdicted Marlowe; "how dare you correct your mother?"

The scene had been too much for Susan's uncertain nerves. All of a sudden, she went to the bed, jumped on it, and began to cry and scream.

"Susan!" ordered Mr. Marlowe emphatically.

"Now, Susan," shrilled Mrs. Marlowe plaintively.

"Susan, stop that noise; stop it, I say," insisted Marlowe.

But Susan's hysterics continued.

"She's got the 'high-strikes' again," decided Mrs. Marlowe.

"Will you stop that damned noise?" shouted Marlowe.

"William! Oh, William!" protested his wife.

"Pull yourself together, girl," said Miss Channing encouragingly, though Susan continued to "high-strike."

"Get her out," suggested Marlowe. "Let's

pour water over her or something.” He grasped a pitcher of water, sprinkled some violently over the maid and, after several such efforts proved ineffective, started to throw the entire contents of the pitcher over the unhappy Susan.

Mary Marlowe suddenly became the very efficient mistress of her own bedroom.

“No, Papa,” she said decisively. “You must at least let me take care of Susan. Susan!” she said.

The tumult of Susan subsided to a certain extent.

“Susan!” Mary commanded again and there was much less noise in the room.

“Susan, dear,” she urged quietly.

The shrieks became sobbing gasps, and finally deep breathing on the part of Susan told every one that her “spell” was over.

Marlowe glared at the two young women. His attitude was rather Napoleonic.

“Well?” he inquired vigorously, for he could think of nothing more forcible to say.

Susan’s lids opened slightly, and then one could see her eyes.

“Oh, Miss Mary,” she said, gaspingly, “you and the young gentleman—and he’s such a

'an'some young gentleman—and you such a pr—such a pretty young l-lady—— And you love each other so true.”

Mr. Marlowe, despite his embarrassment at Susan's unusual behavior, nodded his head sagely, as though to say, “There you have it!” His wife glared at Susan, who now stood self-convicted.

“You wretched girl,” Mrs. Marlowe finally said.

“Exactly,” agreed her husband in a fury.

“You've been the go-between in this disgraceful affair,” accused the mother. “You've known of it all along.”

“Exactly,” said Mr. Marlowe, who was regaining his composure.

“The slyness and ingratitude of the lower classes is appalling,” continued Mrs. Marlowe, raking Susan from head to foot with angry glances.

“Exactly,” agreed her husband, realizing that he was no longer the main figure in the situation, but waiting for a chance again to resume his former position.

“You will take a month's wages, Susan,” asserted Mrs. Marlowe, “and leave this house the first thing to-morrow.”

“But, Mamma,” protested Miss Mary, “it was all my fault. I asked Susan to——”

“Be silent,” ordered her father.

“Yes, the first thing to-morrow,” reiterated Mrs. Marlowe, “and without a character. Leave this room, Susan.”

Mary seized Susan’s hand and said in a fervent whisper, “I’m sorry; oh, I’m so sorry, Susan. I’ll never forget you.”

“Don’t you worry about me, Miss Mary,” insisted Susan, casting at Mr. and Mrs. Marlowe a malignant glance which softened only when it came upon Miss Channing, who held the water-jug, ready to repel another attack of “high-strikes.” Miss Channing, thoroughly bewildered by the proceedings, then decided that the water-jug would not be in immediate need and replaced it on the wash-stand.





## CHAPTER FOUR

MARLOWE coughed violently and turned towards his daughter.

“Now, Miss,” he asked, “what have you to say for yourself?”

“Nothing, Papa,” she replied.

“Nothing?” shouted the angry father. “We shall see about that. ‘Nothing.’ That and similar impudence was all I could get out of the young scoundrel when I confronted him with your last shameless letter this afternoon.”

“My letter——” whispered Mary.

“Yes, your last shameless letter,” he repeated. “It was a love letter, Wife,” he went on in vigorous explanation, “and of the most brazen character. There were actually twenty-five crosses after the signature.”

“Not twenty-five,” protested the horrified mother.

“I counted them,” said Marlowe firmly, “and there were twenty-five.”

“Oh, Mary,” burst out Mrs. Marlowe, walk-

ing unsteadily to the ottoman on which her sister, open-mouthed, was sitting, “you have broken your poor mother’s heart.”

“Were there really twenty-five of them?” asked Miss Channing suddenly, with tremendous interest.

“But how”—faltered Mary—“how did you get my letter?”

“You may well ask, Miss,” he replied, with impressive solemnity. “Young Williams,” he went on, after an equally impressive pause, “who sits next to this scoundrel at the office, found a letter on the floor. He picked it up and glanced at it, and that was enough. The honest lad saw where his duty lay. Without a moment’s hesitation he brought the letter—direct to me.”

“Mr. Williams is jealous of John,” cried Mary breathlessly.

“*John!*” almost shrieked Mrs. Marlowe. “You call him *John?*”

“Yes, John,” repeated Mary, with desperate courage. “John told me so and Mr. Williams is only too glad to hurt him. He wants John’s place.”

“And he *has* John’s place,” said Marlowe grimly. “He has it.”

“Oh, Papa, what have you done?” the girl asked tremulously.

“I dismissed the young scoundrel on the spot,” said her father, turning immediately to his wife for the nod of approbation which came in quick response.

“But he’s not a scoundrel, Papa,” insisted Mary, with soft defiance. “He’s not—a scoundrel.”

“Mary!”

Her mother had no sooner uttered her name than Marlowe shouted, “How dare you contradict your father?”

The girl stood stolidly before him, her lips trembling. She was panting with emotion.

“I repeat it,” Marlowe went on; “he’s an ungrateful young scoundrel! It was only an act of charity on my part when I gave him a stool in my office. I think you understand, Alice,” turning towards his wife, “that his father, who went through the bankruptcy court a few years ago, was a sort—a sort of acquaintance of my younger days, and, of course, I didn’t want to——”

“Papa,” said Mary quietly, “he was your best friend. John told me so.”

“Silence,” demanded the outraged man. He



paused for a few seconds, as though to nullify beyond question any effect of his daughter's reminder, and started to pace the room.

"When I confronted the young scoundrel," he resumed, "and asked him to give me an explanation, he refused to give me one, so I wrote a check for his week's salary and dismissed him then and there." His rapid pace up and down the room became less energetic. He asked his wife, "Would you believe it, Alice, that man had the insolence to take the check from me, tear it up, and throw it on the floor?"

Miss Channing had been watching and listening very closely, though she had kept herself in the background. But when she heard of the theatrical gesture of the young man who tore up his employer's check, and almost literally threw it in his face, she could no longer restrain herself.

"Bravo!" she cried. "Bravo, John!"

She rose from the ottoman again and went to her niece. It was as though she were attending some performance and approved it greatly.

"Now, Eliza, you've no right to take her part," interpolated Mrs. Marlowe. "You simply have no right."

“What is the meaning of this?” asked Mr. Marlowe, in superb agreement. “How dare you interfere?”

“Because a real man is concerned,” she snapped defiantly. “He must be a real man, for he loves Mary, and he threw your check at you. That’s the kind of a man for me—one who is not afraid to love, and is not afraid to do anything to prove that his love is bigger than the petty disapproval of some one who is not so great as he thinks himself to be. Mary!” She went again to the girl, and this time placed her arm around her. “Don’t ever mind,” she urged. “My darling,” she continued, with all the fervor of a lover, “I never thought that there was a man in the world worthy of you—but now I am beginning to believe that I have been wrong. If you love him so much, do anything for him; please, Mary darling, don’t let things that seem so big to-day make you unhappy all your life. If you love——”

“Miss Channing,” pronounced Marlowe urgently, “oblige me by leaving the room this instant.”

“And as for you,” Miss Channing said furiously, “you’re a pompous, selfish——”

“Silence,” cried Marlowe, with a hasty look

towards his wife. Seeing that she continued to approve his stand, he pointed to the door.

Miss Channing took a few steps towards the door.

“And an overbearing tyrannical——”

“Silence!” shouted Marlowe.

“Brute,” concluded Miss Channing, leaving the room and banging the door behind her.

“This is outrageous,” asserted Marlowe, looking at the slammed door.

“I think she must be mad,” agreed his wife.

“Yes, she must be mad,” went on Marlowe, half forgetting the cause of the present quarrel. “I think that this disgraceful affair has robbed her of her few remaining wits. And if this sort of thing ever happens again,” he added warningly, “it will be impossible for your sister and me to live under the same roof.”

“It’s envy, William,” consoled Mrs. Marlowe, “purely envy. In fact, envy’s at the bottom of it all. Poor Eliza can never forgive my having married and having brought a daughter into the world.”

“Your daughter, Alice,” chided her husband, “is scarcely a matter for envy.” He turned



suddenly towards Mary. "Now, Mary," he said, becoming conciliatory and paternal, "I insist that you make a clean breast of everything."

"Very well, Papa," she agreed quietly.

She stood there, a hurt look in her eyes. She faced her father courageously, but traditional obedience caused her to gaze about the room guiltily. She had overturned the lares and penates of the Marlowe family, and, for that, she was very sorry. She saw her angry father and her chagrined mother, and she wished that she had not caused them trouble and suffering. But she thought of John—her John, and the look that met the inquiring gaze of her parents was again defiant. She thought of John Carlton—and nothing else mattered.

"What I don't understand is this," interjected Mrs. Marlowe perplexedly. "How did you become acquainted with the young man? You certainly never were introduced to him—and how can one possibly become acquainted without an introduction?"

She stopped triumphantly; surely these were unanswerable questions that would bring the girl to her knees in a fit of remorse.

Mary did not look at either of them.



“We—met first, Papa,” she said in a low voice, “at your office.”

“At my office,” bellowed Marlowe.

“Yes, Papa,” she continued dreamily. “Mamma and I were fetching you home in the victoria. We went into the office for a moment or two, and as we were going into your room, I—I dropped my parasol, and Mr. Carlton picked it up—and handed it to me.” She paused and concluded, “And then—we looked at each other.”

“Looked at each other. Quite natural,” pursued Marlowe sarcastically. “You could hardly help it.”

“Well, Mary?” sought her mother, with obvious petulance.

“I mean just that,” eventually returned Mary; “we looked at each other—and I loved him—and he loved me.”

Her cheeks flushed, not for the shame with which she stood branded in her parents’ eyes, but in idyllic reminiscence. She pursed her lips thoughtfully, and her eyes brightened. Her parents regarded her with open amazement; this horrible thing was unbelievable, even though the admission came from their own daughter.

“Loved? Loved?” cried the mother.

“Loved! Looked at each other—and—loved?” echoed Marlowe, turning towards his wife.

“Yes, Papa,” said Mary.

The parents exchanged outraged glances, and Marlowe approached his wife solemnly.

“This, Alice,” he suggested, a gloomy tone of sorrow in his voice, “appears to be a case for the doctor.”

“No, Papa, no!” protested Mary earnestly. “I—I am not mad. Of course I didn’t know I loved him then; I didn’t even know what love was. It was only after—after we had met again and written to each other, that I—oh!—I understood everything.”

“Indeed!” smiled Marlowe unpleasantly. “And pray, what did you understand?”

“That I’d loved him from the first moment, and would go on loving him all my life,” explained Mary quickly.

“Ah——?” cried Marlowe, his lips curling.

Mrs. Marlowe, however, was really in deep distress. She had never heard of such frank admissions by young women in even lower middle-class families.

“Mary, how can you say such dreadful immodest things?” she moaned.

Marlowe dropped his sarcastic attitude and became once more the irate father.

“They are a great deal more than immodest,” he boomed. “They are positively unladylike.”

“She takes a good deal after your poor sister, Lucy, William,” broke in Mrs. Marlowe thoughtfully, “of whom——”

Marlowe walked towards the window with the stern rebuke, “Alice!”

“Of whom the least said the better,” she went on briskly, in willing capitulation to his wishes.

“Quite so,” agreed Marlowe, mollified. “Now, young lady,” he continued, walking again to the center of the room, “how often have you met this young man?”

“Eighteen times, Papa,” said Mary, without a moment’s hesitation.

“Eighteen?” asked the astounded Mrs. Marlowe.

“Shh,” warned Marlowe. “Allow me to question this young woman, Alice. Where did you meet him? I am determined to get at the bottom of this—family disgrace.”

“Sometimes in the street—and sometimes in the garden.”

“Oh!” almost shrieked the mother.

“In *this* garden?” Marlowe asked.

“Yes, Papa.”

“I have never heard of such audacity in my life!” he asserted. “And how often have you corresponded, Miss?”

“Every day since our second meeting,” she admitted, with little show of feeling, “and sometimes oftener.”

“Oftener!” exclaimed Mrs. Marlowe incredulously.

“Oftener?” inquired Marlowe, still echoing his wife’s exclamations and expanding on them with thoughts of his own. “How could you write oftener than once a day?”

“By writing twice,” said Mary frankly.

“Twi——” began Marlowe, but even that word failed him. He thought solemnly for a moment, but when he saw that his wife was regaining her poise, and might at any time take the family reins, he faced her and protested with a grave voice.

“There, Alice, you are most emphatically to blame. How was it that you never noticed the daily arrival of those precious letters?”



“But I assure you, William——” Mrs. Marlowe started to reply, when Mary interrupted.

“Mamma is not to blame, Papa,” she said bravely. “I told Mr. Carlton to address all his letters to me to Susan.”

“That wicked girl!” put in the angry mother. “That sly, deceitful girl!”

“No, Alice,” silenced her husband, with a lofty gesture, “it’s quite useless speaking. No comment of ours can adequately describe your daughter’s conduct, and the conduct of her—her accomplices in this scandalous affair. For the present, there’s no more to be said. You will, of course, Wife, go alone to the party this evening. You had better say that your daughter has contracted a slight chill, and that you felt it would be inadvisable to expose her to the night air.”

“A slight chill?” asked Mrs. Marlowe.

Marlowe paused, that the effect of his words might be more lofty. “A slight chill,” he repeated.

“But, William,” his wife implored, “I don’t know how I shall possibly be able to bear up with all this on my mind.”

“A—slight—chill,” he said again with forceful emphasis.

Mrs. Marlowe sighed weakly. "Very well, then," she agreed, and with a tearful, bewildered glance at her daughter she swept from the room, the sides of her dress swishing vigorously as they struck both sides of the doorway.



## CHAPTER FIVE

MARLOWE's respect for his own authority had increased tenfold in the past few moments. He at last saw himself in the position to which he had always unsuccessfully aspired, with a weighty problem which demanded a weighty decision from him alone. He turned to his daughter.

"As for you, Miss," he said austere, "you will have to go to bed without your supper. And until your mother and I have decided what to do with you, you will remain here under lock and key. You understand me?" Mary was not really hungry, though she would have relished the buffet supper waiting downstairs.

"Yes, Papa." She had a very sincere regard for the unpleasantness of the whole situation, but she did not seem appreciatively impressed by the methods that her father used in disposing of it. The past hour had shown—as Miss Channing alone had been able to perceive—that the girl had an inflexible will, not unpleasantly domineering like that of her father, but



mixed with the tenderness that had characterized the life of Miss Channing's and Mrs. Marlowe's mother. She was sympathetic, utterly lovable in the eyes of man or woman, and eager to be loved. Yet Miss Channing realized at once that Mary, her love for a man having been so ardently aroused, would allow no such pranks of fate as those which had broken her own spirit to ruin her life.

"Very well," resumed Marlowe. "That is all I have to say for the present—except to hope that before you go to bed you will ask your Maker"—he paused reverently—"on bended knees—to forgive your wickedness."

With an appealing look of commiseration, he started for the door.

"Please, Papa," urged Mary.

"Well?" He turned towards her.

"Please," she entreated, with panting courage, "will you tell me why—why you and Mamma are so—so against my marrying Jo—I mean, Mr. Carlton?"

Marlowe sputtered with wrath.

"You dare—you have the effrontery—to ask me such a question? A beggar clerk, an impudent—adventurer, the son of a bankrupt—the——"

“But,” protested Mary, with a cry of pain, “oh, no! Please don’t go on. I—I can’t bear it.”

His voice trembling, Marlowe stepped toward her and said, “I would sooner see my daughter lying in her coffin than the wife of such a fellow. Is that clear?”

“Yes, Papa,” the girl answered in a whisper, bowing her head, “but there’s one thing I must tell you. I’ve been deceiving you for a long time, and, though you may not believe it, I hate deceit. I’m not going to deceive you any more, Papa, so I must tell you now that, whatever you may do, I shall go on loving Mr. Carlton and—in three years’ time, when I become of age, I shall marry him.”

Marlowe’s nostrils quivered with rage, and he looked at his daughter with ironical courtesy.

“Indeed? Indeed,” he murmured.

He drew the key from the inner side of the door with elaboration of movement, glanced with majestic sternness at his daughter, who stood, her eyes gleaming, looking straight before her, and went out. Mary heard the insertion of the key, followed by the sharp click of the lock.

She stood there motionless for a moment, and

then, after glancing at the door, tiptoed across the room to it and, with one ear almost at the panel, listened tensely. Satisfied that her father would not return, she ran quickly to the bed, thrust her hand under the pillows, and drew out two letters.

“Two,” she murmured, as she sat on the bed and opened one of the letters. “Sweetheart, I am dropping this in your letter box myself,” she read under her breath. “We’re found out, and I must see you to-night. Your fond father has given me the sack. I shall be in the garden after dark, and shall stay here till daybreak if necessary. I shall whistle at intervals. In haste, darling—John.”

She sat there for a moment, wild-eyed and breathing quickly, and then sprang to her feet and ran to the center window. Drawing the curtains apart and pulling up a blind, she lifted the window sash and peered down into the garden.

“Not yet,” she whispered, shaking her head. Then she went to her dressing-table, placed her letters under a candlestick, and returned to the window, where she again drew the curtains. A noise at the door startled her and she turned, with frightened eyes, to see it open cautiously.





*A First National Picture.*

DR. McGOVERN TOLD THEM TO KEEP UP HOPE.

*Secrets.*





As she saw Miss Channing enter the room, carrying a paper parcel under her arm, she gave a sigh of relief.

“Shh,” Miss Channing cautioned, listening attentively for a moment. “It’s all right,” she assured the girl, closing the door softly. Then she ran to Mary and caught her in her arms.

“My darling,” she whispered in an undertone, “I was just going into the garden to fetch the ladder which Duncan has left against the pear tree.”

“The ladder?” asked Mary.

“Yes,” her aunt returned. “I meant to carry it to the house and climb in at the window.”

“Oh, Auntie,” gasped Mary, horrified at the thought of Miss Channing climbing a ladder.

“But then,” the spinster continued with a chuckle, “it struck me that your father, being such a clever man, might have left the key in the lock. And so he had.” She extended her parcel to Mary. “I’ve brought you something to eat, darling. It’s all I could lay my hands on in the dark pantry without the cook discovering me. Everything on the buffet had been put away.”

“How sweet of you,” cried Mary, giving her

aunt a hug. She took the parcel to the bed, and on unwrapping it found a piece of cake, two apples and a leg of cold chicken.

“It’s poor fare, Mary,” said Miss Channing, “but I couldn’t have thought of your going to bed hungry. I’d have brought you the wing, darling, but there was no knife handy, and a leg’s so much easier to tear off.”

Mary was half laughing, half in tears; for the first time she feared that her emotions would give way.

“And I was obliged to wrap them all up in a sheet of *The Times*,” her aunt went on. “You won’t mind, dear, will you?”

“No, no,” insisted Mary.

“*The Times* is such a clean newspaper,” Miss Channing continued, relieved at the reception of the impromptu parcel.

“How dear of you to think of me, Auntie!” Mary exclaimed.

The older woman’s eyes were suddenly down-cast, and when she raised them they were glistening with bravely repelled tears.

“Whom else have I to think of but you?” she returned, placing a hasty kiss on the lips of her niece. “Darling, you mustn’t be unhappy,”

she said with a trace of fierceness. "If you're brave and true, all will come out right in the end."

"Yes, Auntie," replied Mary with quiet conviction, "I know it will."

"I came back to-night," her aunt told her, "to bring you something to eat in the first place. It is not right to expect one to go without supper, even under these distressing circumstances—and I see no reason why you should not have your proper food. When I came to the supper table, your father, who was pounding the table for Parker, growled a few times, went to the buffet and himself cut a slice of ham which he did not eat, and started to drink brandy liqueur. At the time I left, he had had three and your mother was very upset when the carriage came to the door. I had to wait until the servants had gone to their quarters, though there was little for them to do save clear the table.

"But what I really wanted to see you about was—something else," she confided, her voice softening. "Sit beside me on the ottoman," she suggested, and the girl took her extended hand and went with her. "I'm rather an old



woman—now, Mary”—she smiled as her niece began to protest—“and a spinster. I know that I’m simply tolerated and pitied in this house; they think,” she explained without the slightest rancor, “that I have no other place to go. They are partly right in this respect. I have no other place where I could go and be happy, though, you know, I have my own money.

“The greatest happiness in my life, Mary, after—after I came to live with your parents, was when the nurse let me take you in my arms. It was an hour after you were born. You were so sweet, and I was so happy when I held you there and looked down at you. Your little puckered features, your warm little——” She stopped for adequate words. “I mean, Mary,” she added, “that I wished you were mine. When I gave you back to the nurse, I tried to imagine that you were mine—my own little girl. I have never been able to forget those few moments, and that is why I have always lived near you. There were many times when I thought that I must go into London and take my own lodgings, but I knew that I would rarely see you, then, and that I would lose—my little girl. To-night, I realized for the first time that I must lose you, and—it really made

me very happy. For I knew that you had found your own happiness, though, you little sinner"—she tweaked Mary's cheek lovingly—"it hadn't occurred to me that you would fall in love so soon."



## CHAPTER SIX

MARY said nothing, but placed her hand quietly on Miss Channing's knee. The older woman hesitantly fingered a locket that was suspended on a thin golden chain and which she had unconsciously drawn from her bosom during the last few minutes.

"I wonder," she asked with some embarrassment, "if you would like to see—him?"

"Whom, Auntie?" asked Mary.

"A boy," she said slowly, "whom I once knew."

"Yes, please," urged the girl eagerly, quickly scenting a romance. "Let me see."

Miss Channing opened the locket and looked fondly at a crude photograph, one of the earlier products of the invention which was unperfected even in 1865. The dull "tin-type" showed a young man in the twenties, with stolid profile, and features that betrayed the self-consciousness of the moment. He wore a queer sort of cap, which extended down to the ears and overtopped several inches of side whiskers. The faded ensemble seemed so grotesque to



Mary's eyes that she wanted to laugh, but a quick glance at her aunt, whose face had such a strange expression, caused her instead to clasp tightly the older woman's hand.

"Wasn't he handsome?" asked Miss Channing, with a pathetic sigh.

"Yes, Auntie," agreed Mary quickly—"just wonderful."

"He was my—the man I almost married," the aunt said quietly. She let the locket dangle before her breast, and reached for Mary's hand. "I wanted—that is why," she explained falteringly, "I have always loved you so much, Mary. When I looked at him—and knew that it could never be—I thought of you, darling—my little girl. I have been so grateful to you all these years; you have brought me—such happiness. Tell me, Mary," she asked impetuously, "you are my little girl, aren't you?"

"Why, yes, Auntie," Mary replied, greatly affected. She threw her arms around Miss Channing and kissed her. "Of course I am—and you'll never lose me. Not even if——"

She stopped to see her aunt looking mistily before her.

"Mary," she asked suddenly, "would you

like to hear to-night—something—something I've never told any one?"

"Why, yes, Auntie."

"I wonder if you could understand," the spinster ruminated. "Yes, I think you will," she told herself aloud.

"Tell me, Auntie," begged the girl. "Tell me all about him."

"It doesn't seem so long ago now," Miss Channing admitted. "But I was only nineteen then. We met at a ball in London just after he had been commissioned. I saw him only that night and twice during the next few days, for he was sent to join a company that went up from India to Afghanistan. That was in January, and I had only three letters from him during the year. He went into Cabul with his company, and later was invalided home, before the retreat.

"Those three letters, Mary—I envied you so at having one each day, and sometimes two—made me sure that he—loved me very much. The first was very formal, and the second only hinted at affection. But in the third, Mary, which he wrote from the Punjab, he said, 'I love you, Eliza, and wish that I might see you.' I had been very sure in London, for on the

night before he left he—he patted my hand, and said that he hoped soon to return home.

“He had to leave the army; he had been shot in the leg when he went out with the patrol one night, and the surgeons said that he could never again stand the strain of marching. He had not been home a week, Mary, before he asked me to marry him. Or rather, he asked me if I would marry him if my parents—your grandparents—would give their approval. Your grandfather, darling, was a very determined man and I advised my suitor to wait a short while and establish himself in business before taking a wife.

“He went into a counting-house, and before long had enough money, through careful saving and well-advised investments, to start his own business on a modest scale. He decided to make a grand coup and when something happened to the jute market without warning, he found himself a bankrupt.

“You know that that made no difference to me, Mary—whether he had a sovereign or ten thousand pounds. But he was so chagrined at the disgrace that he asked me to meet him outside the house. I urged him to be patient, and I was certain that my father would make al-



lowances for a man who had been in the service and had worked so hard at home. I told him to call the following Sunday at tea-time, and that we might be able to have a moment alone together in the garden afterwards.

“I let only mother know—I did not dare to tell my father—that he was coming, and she assured me that there would be no mention of his recent misfortune. Mother was always very tolerant of young people who got into difficulties and I had told her that I was in love—privately, of course. Your grandmother, Mary,” she explained, “was a wonderful person. One could hardly tell affairs of the heart to my dear sister, but my mother always invited confidences.

“It happened that my father was on the lawn, smoking, when my invited guest arrived. Some other young men came with him—including your own father. They walked through the gate, and, after greeting my father, walked to the garden, where mother, my sister and I were waiting. My father called aside the boy who had come to—to see me. They talked for a few moments. I looked around the rose arbor and I saw the young man’s face grow white as my father talked with him. Father asked him



a question or two—I could tell, even from a distance—and then pointed to the gate. I saw him once afterwards before he married, and then I was too ashamed to ask him to come across the road.”

“Before he married?” asked Mary Marlowe in horror. “And he didn’t marry—no, of course. Did he marry some one else, Auntie?”

“Yes—within the month. She was a very fine woman, Mary, and very much in love with him. No, don’t look that way, Mary,” Miss Channing protested. “He told her about—about me, and she was willing to take the chance—in spite of everything. She had loved him for years, and—I—I—am sure—that they were very happy. He died ten years afterwards.”

“Poor Auntie,” said Mary, her lips quivering. “I’m so sorry, Auntie. I never realized——”

“But you must,” cried Miss Channing, passionately. “I didn’t tell you this just to tell a story. I told it to you because—because you must know how much I love you. Mary, God save you from the loneliness of empty arms, the terrible memory of the dream that might have come true. You are not like me, Mary;

we belong to a different age. You have more freedom than I had—I was nineteen before my first ball. And when I saw your father, who is several years behind the times, send you to bed without supper, I decided that I must talk to you and”—she added shyly—“tell my story—if you wanted to hear it.

“Mary,” she went on, with intense seriousness, “I think that you are really in love. You are no longer my baby girl; no girl could have championed her lover as you did to-night. Darling baby girl,” she continued in immediate contradiction, “don’t let your father or mother, nor heaven or earth, keep you from the man you love. You could not live as I have lived, for you would not have a Mary Marlowe to make life worth while. It is wrong for me to come here against the wishes of my sister and your father, but I could not help it. I had to tell you, darling. You understand now, don’t you?”

She clasped the locket that had been hanging from its chain and put it back in her bosom.

“I think so, Auntie. I understand—about you,” the girl, now tearful, declared. “But what—what shall I do?”

“Keep on loving him,” Miss Channing told

her. "Love him always, if you are certain now. And let no power on earth, not even your father and mother, keep you from him. I have never seen him—that is, not in recent years." Mary did not immediately notice the break in her colloquy as she went on, "But love him always, darling. I know that he must be a fine man."

Mary thought for a moment.

"Didn't you say that you had not seen him in recent years, Auntie?" she asked, curious as the possible meaning of her aunt's phrase dawned upon her.

"Did I?" asked Miss Channing, perturbed.

"Yes, Auntie. That was what you said. What did you mean by 'recent years'?"

"Why, I saw John—Mr. Carlton, when he was a boy."

"And did you know his father and mother, Auntie?" Mary asked avidly.

"Yes, dear, I knew them many years ago," she replied.

"Tell me about him, Auntie—I mean, John's father," Mary pressed. "Papa said such bad things about him to-night that I could hardly hold myself back. Was he such a bad man, Auntie? Please tell me; it wouldn't make any difference about—John. And tell me about his



mother. John said that she was a beautiful woman, but had died soon after his father was buried."

"No, he was not a bad man, Mary," Miss Channing said slowly. "Your father was very wrong in saying so. And his mother was very fine—and—and noble. His father was very—fine—and noble—also."

"But, Auntie, why are you crying?" asked Mary, turning towards Miss Channing and seeing floods of tears coming without restraint from her eyes. "Don't worry, Auntie, I'll do as you say. I won't stop loving him, and I won't let him stop loving me. Doesn't that make you happier?"

"Yes, darling," her aunt agreed, but a fresh flow of tears preceded an outburst of sobs.

"Auntie, what's the matter?" asked Mary, now mystified.

"No. You can't understand."

"I'm sure I do, Auntie. Now do stop weeping, Auntie," she said in a desperate effort to quell the tears. "I'll really do anything that you ask. Tell me what to do, Auntie."

The spinster turned her eyes towards Mary and tried to keep back the sobs.

"Darling," she cried, her eyes glazed with



tears, "I know that your John must be wonderful and you must—you must leave me, baby girl. I know that he must be perfect, and I know that you will always love each other. Listen to me, Mary," she said, her breath coming in quick snatches. "His mother married him when she knew that he had just come from me a month before and she did not care. She must have been wonderful to do that. And your boy's father was once—was once—my own boy. Don't you know now, Mary, why I love you so much—so much more to-night than ever before? This is a kind of—consecration—the finest substitute that I could ever have had. Please love him; please be good to him—always, Mary."

"I will, Auntie," promised Mary, frankly weeping as her aunt's frame shook with sobs. "I will—*so much*."

"Then it's all right," said Miss Channing, desperately dabbing the tears from her cheeks and eyes. "And haven't I been very foolish and sentimental to-night? It really has been ridiculous."

## CHAPTER SEVEN

THE aunt's mood changed and became girlishly enthusiastic.

"And what a fine gentleman your beau must be," she exclaimed. "And tell me, dear, is he very handsome?"

"Oh, yes," Mary replied, somewhat embarrassed at the sudden question. "At least, I think so."

"Has he a mustache, darling, and beautiful long whiskers?" pursued Miss Channing eagerly.

"No—no, Auntie," said Mary with a shy smile. "He hasn't any mustache—and just small whiskers. He's only twenty-one," she explained, "and the whiskers are—there." She touched Miss Channing's face below one ear, to indicate the prevalent and popular "sideburns."

"Oh, but of course," her aunt went on encouragingly, "he could grow them as long as he liked, if he wanted to." The description of the lover's hirsute attainments was not en-

couraging, in that age of profuse and profound whiskers on all men of merit, but Miss Channing was always sanguine when Mary was even remotely concerned.

“I’m sure he could, Auntie,” professed Mary hopefully. “But what are they going to do to me?” she inquired, her pretty face clouding with anxiety.

Miss Channing hesitated, and sought to evade the question.

“I—I don’t know, darling,” she asserted.

Her niece looked steadily at her and asked, “Please tell me, Auntie.”

The older woman still hesitated, and she admitted with some difficulty, “Darling, as your Mamma was leaving the house, I heard your Papa say, ‘I shall take your child to-morrow to—to Peebles.’ ”

“Peebles?” asked Mary, with a tragic whisper. “To—to Uncle Sandy and Aunt Sophia at the Manse?” Her stoicism of the evening nearly gave way as she sobbed in protest, “No, no, no.”

Miss Channing went to her and held the girl to her closely. She herself was almost weeping, for she realized what exile to the gloomy Manse in Scotland with austere, provincial rela-

tives would mean to the young girl who bloomed so radiantly in the happy gardens of England. Mary, with an effort, pulled herself together to comfort her aunt.

“Don’t worry about me, Auntie,” she assured her. “I’ll get through all right, but the Manse is such a cold and lonely place. I don’t think that any one ever laughed there.”

“Certainly not your Uncle Sandy and Aunt Sophia,” agreed Miss Channing vigorously.

Mary was about to reply when there came a low but distinct whistle from the garden. She started, and gave a quick glance at the window.

“Where’s Papa, Auntie?” she asked.

“I think he went to his study after Mamma left.”

“You’re sure, Auntie?” she insisted, as another whistle, this time louder, was heard. “You had better leave me now,” she proceeded rapidly. “Supposing you were found here! There’d be a dreadful scene. And—and—I want to be alone—to think—and to eat my supper.”

“Yes, dear, I understand,” agreed Miss Channing, who gave no sign that she had heard either whistle. “Shall I unhook your dress before I go?”



“No, no,” replied Mary distraitly. “You see, Auntie”—she paused, and then hurried on—“it’s a new dress, and so lovely! I want a chance to look at myself before I take it off.”

As a third whistle came from the garden, Mary threw her arms around Miss Channing’s neck. “Good night, Auntie,” she cried, drawing her towards the door. “I’ll so enjoy the nice things you’ve brought me to eat. Thank you for all your sweetness to me.”

“And keep up your courage, darling,” Miss Channing begged. “And,” she whispered in the girl’s ear, “such happy dreams of your own, true love.”

They kissed, and Miss Channing cautiously opened the door and glided out but not without a knowing smile that was unobserved by Mary. Wild-eyed and alert, the girl listened to the receding footsteps. Then she went quickly to the dressing table, put out all but one of the candles, and placed the remaining one in a safe corner of her large closet, leaving the room in utter darkness. She tiptoed to the window, drew aside the curtains, and stood there, silhouetted against the brightness of a moonlit sky.

“Oh,” she cried happily. “John!”

“Did you get my letters?” he asked anxiously. She saw him now, standing under a fruit tree. The whiteness of his face stood out among the shadows.

“Yes, John.” She was trembling with delight now.

“Come down,” he urged.

“I can’t,” she said; “I can’t come down to you.”

“Why not?”

“Papa’s locked me in,” she explained.

“Well, then I must climb up,” he announced energetically.

Mary’s voice was edged with fear as she objected, “Climb? Climb up? No, that’s impossible. You’d hurt yourself. You mustn’t.” Then there was an eager change of voice as she remarked, “John, if you must climb up there’s a ladder; it’s standing against the pear tree.” She gestured to the right of the lawn. “Yes, yes,” she cried, as he reached it and carried it towards the shrubs at the foot of the balcony.

She stood back a little from the window, with a frightened sigh of rapture, both hands clasping her cheeks. Her eyes gleamed with a new

fire, and as her heart beat frantically, her breath came in short, irregular gasps.

John stood near the top of the ladder, looking over the ledge of the balcony. He was young, very young, though his "whiskers" did come well below his ears, as Mary had declared a few moments ago. His features were clean-cut and fine; his smile, almost boyish, though his lips seemed ready to be stern, and his chin was undeniably determined. Just now he was transfixed by the vision before him.

Then he vaulted over the railing, and eagerly went towards the girl, who, frightened by the terrific drumming of her heart, walked back from the window. She smiled quaveringly, beckoningly, and he walked towards the window, as though in a trance, never taking his eyes from her. Suddenly she disappeared into the darkness, ran to the door, listened anxiously for a second, and came swiftly back to the center of the room.

"Oh, John," she exclaimed in a happy, timorous voice.

Carlton had hoisted himself inside the window and was staring at the white figure before him.

“Come here, I want you,” he demanded in hushed ardent tones.

“Oh, my love—my love,” she sobbed, walking towards his outstretched arms.

“My darling, my darling,” he cried, as she came close, and he crushed the dainty figure to him.

Their faces shone in the moonlight; their eyes were like unquenchable fire. She felt his panting breath on her cheek, and raised her lips to his. To each it was something awful, terrible and so wonderful!

“My darling, my darling,” she breathed, as she relaxed deep into his arms. They swayed together for moments, as they kissed passionately.

After a breathless interlude, he began, speaking regretfully, “You know how it all happened—my infernal—pardon, dear—carelessness in dropping your letter.”

She nodded, and he went on with bitterness, “And he went for you, didn’t he, like the loving parent that he is?”

“Yes, John.”

“And now he’s locked you in? Yes, but on the whole, I’m not sorry this has happened.



It's brought things to a head—and we're forced to act. Listen, darling."

She drew the curtains, went noiselessly to the closet, brought out the burning candle, and from it lit another.

He started to outline their future. There was nothing here for them now. He could not possibly obtain another position, even as poor as his had been, in London without references. The provinces, even more exacting than the metropolis, when the stranger was concerned, were out of the question. He had thought of India and Australia, but they would be too remote, and Canada was too unsettled beyond the cities, in his opinion, to offer much opportunity to a youth without hereditary backing.

But the United States must be different, he thought. Men soon became wealthy in that great country if they were willing to take risks, and the peace after the Civil War had encouraged prospecting in the tremendously rich though undeveloped sections.

Her eyes opened wide at this unexpected discourse, and she looked at him in admiring wonder.

"My God, how beautiful you are," he ex-

claimed hoarsely, interrupting his profound talk about his plans. "My queen! My own!"

He held her hand against his cheek, then led her to a chair.

"My darling," he continued, trying desperately to think of things other than the girl before him, "I am going to America. A ship sails in three days." His voice was calm, but his intense excitement was evident. "I'm going there, Mary, so that I can make a fortune in a very short time, and come back to you. Then your father, who promptly gave me the sack, may feel differently about our marrying."

"America——?" asked Mary, under her breath. "You?"

"Yes, darling."

"America?" Her eyes became dilated.

"I must, sweetheart."

She puzzled only for an instant, and got up from her chair.

"John," she cried, "then I must go with you."

"That couldn't be," he returned, amazed at the suggestion.

"It must be," she said with return to her normal decision. "Do you think, John," she asked tenderly, placing her hands against her

face, "that I could live without you now? Don't you understand——?"

"Yes," he answered quickly, seizing her hands and grasping them like a vise. "And I understand that if you run away with me, your family will consider that you have disgraced them, and will utterly disown you. You would have nobody in the world to depend upon but me—and I'm only——"

The expression of breathless amazement on her face gave way to one of exaltation.

"Nobody but you?" she asked softly, glorying in the wistful desire in his eyes. "You're all I want—now, and to the end of my life."

"Mary!" he cried, wavering.

"And I'll follow you to the end of the world," she went on, seeking his lips.

"No—no!" He avoided her lips, quickly kneeled beside her, and poured kisses on the slim hands that he had feverishly seized. "You don't realize—you can't. Don't speak," he urged, tense with passion. "You've never known anything but ease and comfort. If you come to me, you'll know poverty and hardship. I'm desperately poor—with only a few hundred pounds left by my mother. Over there, I shall go out West. It's a wild, rough country. It's



the roughest of lives. You'll have to cook—you'll have to sew—you'll—you'll——" He stopped and glanced incredulously at her dainty fingers and looked up, to read her face.

She was as in a dream, with wide eyes, looking far before her, and parted lips.

"Yes, John," she agreed, in a strange distant voice.

"Darling, listen," he said desperately, though his face lost none of its eagerness. "For years and years, I shall be a poor man—a—a working man. And you'll be a poor woman—a working woman. You'll be tired. You'll suffer, if you go with me. All you'll have will be my love—and my *love*. But you'll suffer——" He stopped to devour her expression of happiness, and whispered, "Are you listening, dear? Do you understand?"

"Yes, John," she sighed.

"Well? Well?" he asked, in a hoarse, passionate whisper.

"It—it sounds all—so beautiful," she said, nodding her head slowly and looking above into space.

"Beautiful, you angel! Yes, beautiful! But think of all that it means. Mary, do you realize that for years and years I shall never



be able to give you a dress like this?" He pointed to the wonderful creation that she wore.

"What do dresses matter?" she asked scornfully.

"They won't matter," he said exultantly. "They shan't matter now until I can give them to you myself. And then they shall only matter because it's *I* who give them to you; and you will wear them just for me." His arms were about her, and his low voice gathered in intensity and emotion. "I shall succeed for you, my darling; I promise it. One day you will be the wife of a great man. You shall be proud of me. You shan't have a wish ungratified that money can buy. And never, never, Mary, shall you want for anything that love can buy. Mary—Mary—say you believe in me. Tell me you believe in me—and love me."

## CHAPTER EIGHT

SHE held his head against her breast, and for many minutes they whispered to each other. She told her lover only what he already knew, but he made her repeat the sweet phrases again and again. Finally he told her that he must go, with a pertinent glance at the door through which her father, or perhaps her mother, returning from the ball, might enter. The girl was in consternation; she told him that she would be sent to Peebles in the morning and that there would be no hope of her leaving the watchful eye of her Aunt Sophia. And then, if the boat sailed on Tuesday, she would no more be in Scotland than John would be preparing to sail for America.

“Then you must come away with me to-night,” he declared, with swift decision. “No, listen,” he went on, as she started to protest. “I’ll take you to my married sister. She knows all about us, and you’ll be safe with her.”

“Very well, John,” agreed the girl in a small voice, but without hesitation.

They walked towards the window unthinkingly, and Carlton suddenly became the man of action. Before anything else, he decided, the new dress must be changed.

“Change it, n-n-now?” she asked.

“Quick, quick,” he urged, unmindful of her modesty.

“Y-y-yes, John,” she obeyed, fumbling desperately with hooks and laces.

John watched her impatiently.

“Here,” he said, “let me help.”

“Oh, no,” she cried, in an agony of shyness.

“That’s all right, dear,” he assured her briskly. “Look upon me as your lady’s maid. I’m the only one you’ll have for the Lord knows how long.”

She submitted obediently and stood while he unfastened the bodice, one hand holding a burning cheek. He soon was in difficulties.

“Confound these hooks and things,” he muttered. “There,” with obvious relief, “that’s done.”

He helped her out of her elaborate dress, quite oblivious of her intense shyness. Mary’s face was crimson. Just as he had successfully lifted it over her head, after an interrupted effort to lower it to her feet, there came a sharp

rap at the door, and Marlowe intoned, "Mary!"

"Yes, Papa?" his daughter gasped, but in words of forced evenness.

"What have you got the candles lit for?"

The key turned audibly in the lock, and the door opened a little. Mary rushed to try and shut the door, and John, frozen with terror of his late employer, prepared to dive from the window. But the girl kept her head, and, with full appreciation of Victorian customs, almost shouted:

"No! I'm *undressing*. You can't come in, Papa."

Both she and Carlton stood petrified, watching the slit in the door.

"Humph! Put those candles out before you go to bed. But you must be in bed in five minutes," came the voice from the corridor.

"Yes, Papa," she agreed.

"Very well."

He closed the door, locked it, and the relieved intriguants stood rigid as statues. After they were sure that he had gone downstairs, John immediately took command again. He threw the cast-off dress over the back of a chair, and ordered Mary to hurry.

"Get the plainest dress you have and the



thickest of boots," he told her, and she ran to her wardrobe.

When Mary, with John's eager but inefficient aid, had slipped off the two petticoats which remained over the crinoline, she brought out her darkest and plainest frock. He held it perplexedly for a moment, intent on assistance, until she suggested with a shy smile that it had to be put on over her head. It was of dull blue silk, trimmed with narrow bands of black velvet ribbon. To complete the costume in which she was destined to travel many miles across the Atlantic, and across half the continent of North America, she perched a flower-lined "scoop" bonnet on her dark curls, and wrapped herself in a voluminous blue cape of woolen stuff, and replaced her dainty slippers with sterner walking boots. She hastily packed a small bag with linen undergarments and her toilette requisites; then she went to her desk, took out her diary, with glossy leather covers which were locked by heavy brass hinges, and placed it in her tiny muff. She was ready to go.

"Just a minute—let me think," broke in John. "Your father will go first to my lodgings to-morrow, and I must give the landlady to understand that I have gone to Scotland.



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THE FIRST WARNING OF THE RUSTLERS' ATTACK.

*Secrets.*





Now, you must leave a note to your father to the same effect. When he goes to interview her to-morrow, she'll corroborate your statement. That'll head the fellow off."

"But, John," she said in dismay, "that isn't true, is it?"

"Sit down and write, 'Dear Papa: I have gone to Scotland to marry John,' " he ordered sternly.

"But that's not true," she reiterated earnestly, penning the note, nevertheless.

"Of course it isn't, or I wouldn't have asked you to write it," he agreed with impatience.

"And I told him that I'd never deceive him again."

"You've got to," he insisted masterfully.

"Got to?" she questioned, turning towards him incredulously. "You—command me to do it, John?"

"I certainly do," he replied, folding his arms and attempting a frown.

She gave a frightened, happy gasp, took up her quill, and looked inquiringly at him.

"Now say," he dictated, "'I hope you will try and forgive me. Your obedient daughter, Mary.' " She finished writing, and he directed, "Just leave it there on the desk."



She placed the inkwell on the edge of the note and got up.

“Now come, darling,” he said. He took her hand and led her towards the window, then seized her in his arms. They kissed, and he withdrew his lips to whisper through clenched teeth, “It’s not too late to draw back, Mary.”

“Oh, John, dear,” she cried, deeply hurt.

“No, listen,” he said again, moving slightly from her, but still holding her in his arms. “I’ve told you a little of what’s in store for you. But it’s not too late—you can still——”

She put her hand over his mouth.

“No, John. You love me. That’s all I ask,” she answered.

He leaned forward, and she let fall her hand so that he could have her lips. They seemed to melt together, and her eyes, beaming, closed in happiness as she saw the longing in his. Yes, her heart told her as it throbbed, this was her darling, and she would live where he lived, and only as long as he lived. Nothing else mattered. Life had just begun; it must never end now.

Suddenly he broke their embrace and gently forced her from him. He pointed speechlessly

to the candles and she blew them out, one by one. Quickly he went to the window and raised the blind, and the room was once more a moon-lit dusk. She came to him again, and he helped her over the window-sill. They crossed the balcony, and he raised her gently over the ledge until her feet were secure at the side of the ladder.

“You go down first, darling,” he whispered, holding her bag and muff, as she felt with one foot for the first available rung. “I’ll hold you firmly; you needn’t be afraid.”

“I—I’m not in the l-least afraid, John,” she assured him, though her teeth were chattering with terror.

He went neatly over the ledge and, holding the bag and muff in one hand and Mary’s clenched fist in the other, followed her slowly down the ladder, bracing his shoulders awkwardly against the two uprights.

“I was really very frightened, John,” she admitted as they stood together on the flags. “Yet I had never before been quite so happy as I was when you came into my room to-night. You are so—so brave, John,” she told him softly, placing her white hands on his shoulders

and drinking in the jubilant smile—almost a grin—that played on his lips. She looked up at the moon, which she thought was perceptibly sinking to the woodland sky-line, and then turned her head towards the house.

“That is Papa’s den,” she said, nodding towards a solitary light in the center of the house. “Do you know, John, he had three brandy liqueurs to-night—and no supper at all? And he always eats a good supper and never takes more than two brandy liqueurs, even when we have guests. I can just imagine him up there, John—from what Aunt Eliza told me. He is walking up and down the floor and talking to himself. When he goes out, he will slam the door, and when he comes back to the den, he will slam it behind him again.”

“There will be nothing like that in—in our house,” asserted John boastfully. “Not even after we have been married for twenty years. And our—our daughter will never——”

Mary locked his lips with her finger.

“You mustn’t think badly of Papa,” she told him. “He does not know how we love each other.”

“We must go, Mary,” warned John. “Your



mother may be back at any time from the ball and go to your room."

"Yes, John," agreed the girl, though she still lingered. She felt the tears coming and turned her face from the moonlight so that he could not see them. "I am so happy when I think of all that is before us, but it—it is hard to leave home, John. And I wonder what will happen to Susan. Mamma dismissed her without a character for bringing your notes to me. It is a shame; she lied so beautifully."

"Mary, darling," her lover insisted anxiously, "please come now before——"

"And Socrates," exclaimed Mary in sudden consternation. "I wonder if Duncan will be good to him when I have gone."

"Who in the—I'm sorry, dear—who is Socrates?" asked John impatiently.

"Why, he's the most gorgeous rooster in the yard," she explained, "and he'll eat corn out of my hand. If any one else goes near him, he's positively vicious."

"I see." John placed an arm around her waist and gently drew her down the walk. They carefully stepped on the grass between the noisy flags. "My cycle is in here," he



said, leaving her to disappear in a maze of flowering bushes. He came back at once, pushing the high bicycle, with its one great wheel and a smaller one in back to sustain its giant frame. "We'll have to go on it," he told her, quietly now, because they were near the road.

"Yes, John." She clutched at his free hand.

He opened the gate, looked up and down the road cautiously, and turned his stern face towards her. All trace of boyishness had gone.

"It's not too late, Mary," he whispered. "I can take you back now if you are—if you think that you'd—rather not—go with me."

She smiled gently as she turned towards the house, and saw its lights flicker through the rustling leaves of the trees.

"I made up my mind up there, John," she said, pointing to her darkened bedroom, "and I shall never change. I never want to come back—unless you are with me."

He brushed her cheek with his lips and wheeled his bicycle to the cobble-stones.

"Jump on quickly behind me," he ordered, as he mounted the high machine and steadied it for the moment by twisting the handle-bars. Almost as soon as his feet struck the pedals and began to push violently, she was behind

him on the narrow seat, her scantily crinolined dress flapping in the breeze.

She gritted her teeth bravely as the wheel rattled noisily over the rough pavement, and clung to her lover with arms that were so tense that they could not tremble.



## CHAPTER NINE

AGAINST a majestic range of snow-covered mountains, bluish-mauve in the distance, a primitive wooden shack was etched in bold relief. A thin spiral of silver smoke, curling from the chimney, proclaimed that it was a home, a refuge in this particularly wild and unsettled part of the West. Wyoming, then, was being sparsely populated by a scattering of men who had turned from the excitement of the Civil War to the only remaining excitement of peace—that which came with prospecting in a strange territory, where one must be an adventurer to survive. And those who had come from other countries to the United States, like John Carlton, naturally went along the recently broken trails, and, following the example of the wiser minds, started to raise cattle.

Ice-coated timber fences, hastily improvised, but adequately secure, enclosed the cabin within a radius of five hundred yards; they were broken only by two great swinging gates, which opened wide enough to give access to horse-



men, three abreast. Beyond the limits of this stockade, the vast fields of snow were trampled everywhere by the hurrying feet of cattle, and the more emphatic hoof-prints of horses.

The small dwelling was obviously sturdy, though it must have been built by hands inexperienced even in elementary construction, apparently assisted in the more technical details by other and more experienced hands. A low roof of rough shingles, over which the snow now lay protectingly, covered the dwelling. In the rear, there was a diversion from the rectangular shape that was apparent from the front; this was the second room which had been added to the main structure, the bedroom of the unimposing quarters.

It was late in a winter afternoon of 1870. Before the open fireplace, where flames flickered and danced, sat Mary Carlton, her tiny baby in her arms.

The warm radiance of the big logs, which crackled under the steaming iron cauldron, vied successfully with the feeble light filtering through the unshuttered windows in illuminating the room, which in that uncertain dimness seemed large.

The crude furniture, a table, some chairs and

a dresser, hand-hewn from native logs, were John's first handiwork on reaching Wyoming. Warm bear-skin rugs on the roughly finished wood floor, the glint of copper utensils, blue and white dishes on the shelves of the dresser, and gay little figured red calico curtains at the windows relieved the bareness of this rude interior. They all showed the loving touch of a woman who could invest any surroundings, no matter how crude or humble, with a home-like atmosphere.

This was the home of Mary and John Carlton—their home after a long journey across the Atlantic and more than half the continent of North America, a long journey of hardships and uncertainty. Here John Carlton had brought his bride, and together they had worked and suffered. There had been overwhelming discouragements and strangely bewildering experiences, while they built their cabin, and made their start in the new cattle country. Here their son had been born, the youngster who was such a source of joy to Mary and the delight of John.

As the pale afternoon sunlight died, Mary stood up and looked out of the small-paned window into the growing dusk. It was hard to

reconcile the sight of this cabin and the efficient young woman in her strictly utilitarian dark woolen dress, without either style or fit, the woman whose hair was simply parted and knotted at the nape of her neck, with the glorious vision of Mary Marlowe, who two years before had stood in front of the mirror in the security of her room at Blackheath, radiant in costly silks and laces.

Yet she was as beautiful as ever, and her face had the new charm of love and motherhood, together with that apparent spirit of conquering power which England's pioneer women have ever carried to the ends of the earth.

The transition which she had anticipated with shining eyes as she stood before her lover in her bedroom had at first been the wonderful dream that she expected. Not until the sailing vessel had passed Queenstown did she for a moment question the wisdom of her step. Then she became deathly ill, and she forgot the zeal with which she had pleaded with the Liverpool Registrar to overlook the technical banns and make her Mrs. John Carlton. John had wanted to be married in England; but, as he had so vehemently announced, he would sail that after-



noon with the young woman, and would place her in the care of the stewardess until they reached New York, if Registrar Kilrain did not see fit to make Mary Marlowe his wife. The Registrar, under the extraordinary circumstances, obtained some sort of official sanction and Mary was John's wife before she left England.

There were days and days in the tiny room with its two bunks, but Mary, after her seasickness had gone, joined her husband, who seemed immune, and walked the narrow deck with him. At night, they sat silently together, and watched the billows of the Atlantic pile themselves uselessly against the prow of the heaving vessel.

Castle Garden—New York! They stayed for several days in the great city, which had buildings so high and vast that one could hardly appreciate them. Some of them had five stories, and it was said that a seven-story building was planned.

John found a friend on Oliver Street who had come to the United States a year before. The West, he told Carlton, had the best opportunities, and the men who had just fought in the Civil War were pushing westward, towards



the Pacific Coast, where San Francisco was a thriving city. But there was no better opportunity, he urged wisely, than in the intermediate and undeveloped territory. In fact, the farther one went beyond the Mississippi River, the better the chances of quick and sure gain. Cattle was becoming the leading money-maker of the West, and was supplanting gold; for cattle raising was certain to bring profit, while the mines and gold-bearing streams were a matter of speculation—something to be avoided by a man with a wife to support.

They started for Wyoming by train, and then continued the trip by stage-coach until finally John decided that they should stop and make their fortune. There was no trouble about obtaining land; it could be had almost for the asking. John found that the men of the county were willing to help him erect his cabin; and he invested what was left from his mother's legacy in cattle. He soon had acre upon acre, and after the first round-up, he knew that it was only a question of time before he would be able to give Mary everything that she could desire. There were cattle rustlers, to be sure, who stole the cattle, after changing the brands, but they had already been marked and their

depredations would not be of long duration. At any rate, they were not able to make serious inroads on the constantly increasing stock, though they were a continuous source of annoyance.

John Carlton found himself firmly established in Wyoming.

Mary, after looking anxiously out of the window, returned to the low chair by the fire, and, rocking her blanket-wrapped baby in her arms, sang quietly:

“Jesus, tender shepherd, hear me,  
Bless my little lamb to-night.  
Through the darkness, be Thou near me;  
Keep me safe till morning light.  
May my sins be all forgiven——”

She stopped her prayerful song and looked down on the white face of her child.

“My little lamb,” she whispered; “you have no sins.”

Suddenly she heard the muffled sound of horses’ hoofs in the snow. She placed the baby in the cradle, covered him quickly, and ran to the window. Two horsemen galloped up from the west gate and rapidly approached the house.

“Hi, Bob!” she heard her husband shout and then louder, as he came nearer the shack, “Oh, Bob!”

“John,” she cried excitedly. She went to open the door.

“Look after the horses, Bob,” John Carlton ordered. “The doctor’ll be riding off in about half an hour or so.”

There was a murmured reply, and two men came stamping up to the door, which Mary held open.

“Oh, Doctor, thank God you’ve come,” she greeted the man who came up ahead, carrying his saddle-bags. “Thank God!”

“Sheer good luck, my dear Mrs. Carlton,” he replied. He was a bluff, homely man, with an assuring smile that lit up his entire countenance. Above his high cowhide boots were fringes of heavy woolen stockings. He went to the fire, stood before it for a moment, took off his gloves, hat and coat, and put them on the stool. His saddle-bags he threw at the side of the cradle. Then he walked to the fire again and clapped his hands briskly.

John Carlton entered a moment later. He seemed much more mature, though not much older, than on the evening when he and his



wife had eloped from her father's house. His face was bronzed; the formerly prized "whiskers" had disappeared, and the strong frame which almost burst from his rough clothing told of hardships, work—and health.

"If the snowdrift on the high-trail hadn't forced the doctor out of his way," he said jubilantly, "I doubt whether I could have run him down within five hours."

He put his arms around Mary, and, after kissing her fervently, asked, "How is he?"

"I—I don't know," she faltered; "he seems so weak—and so helpless."

"I'll soon tell you, Mrs. Carlton," the doctor put in cheerily. He knelt down beside the cradle, placed his long blunt fingers tenderly on the baby's forehead, and with his other hand reached beneath the covers for the baby's tiny wrist. There was no expression on his face except that of assuring complacency.

John Carlton and his wife stood in silent suspense for more than a minute; then John broke in, with an anguished voice:

"What do you think, Doctor?"





## CHAPTER TEN

THE physician, one of those brave souls who, like many others, had followed the westward American pioneers with no thought of gain and no hope of the normal rewards of his calling, lifted his face from his patient and smiled at the mother. He was experienced in medicine, but the lure of the great West had gripped him, as it had gripped men of every profession. But, unlike most of them, he devoted himself solely to the life work which he had originally chosen. And he understood the men and women of the New West.

He looked at his watch and released the baby's wrist.

"Now, just wait a minute, folks," he ordered, taking from somewhere a clinical thermometer, one of his prized possessions and a heritage of his medical duty in the recent war. "You just go and fix me up with a hot drink, if you will, Mrs. Carlton, and don't you go on imagining all kinds of horrors. And don't bother my patient and me," he ordered, good-humoredly.

“Oh, I’m so sorry, I——” she began, but her husband took her arm and motioned significantly towards the boiling pot.

She went to the bottom of the dresser and took out a whisky bottle, pouring some of its contents into a glass. Then she put a spoon in the glass, and, scooping out some water from the boiling pot over the fire, filled the glass with the hot water.

“Won’t you have a bit of grub, Doctor?” John asked, as Mary whisked a few bits of seasoning into the toddy.

“No, no, thanks,” he said. “Haven’t got time. All I’ll need is the drink.”

He soon produced the thermometer and read it carefully, his expression never changing.

“Don’t worry,” was his admonition. “He’ll come through all right if I’m any judge.”

He took the glass that Mary brought him and drank its contents as quickly as their temperature permitted. Then he took his doctor’s bag into his lap, selected two or three vials, and gave Mrs. Carlton certain suggestions and orders as he handed her papers of medicine.

“He’s always been so bright,” volunteered Carlton, “and he looks for me, you know. Whenever I come in, that youngster hears me

and when I take him up, he chirps and holds onto me. The strength he's got in his little fists—you wouldn't believe it at that age, Doc."

"Oh, yes, I would," smiled McGovern. "I believe everything a father tells me about his baby."

"But since yesterday, he hasn't noticed me," objected Carlton, very perturbed.

"Because he wanted me—his mother," put in Mary.

Dr. McGovern repeated his instructions, packed his saddle bags, and put on his outer clothes. As he went towards the door, he motioned to John to follow him.

"Good day, Mrs. Carlton," he said, "and if anything goes wrong, I'll be here in no time at all." That was despite the fact that his home was in the small settlement more than twenty miles away.

Carlton smiled reassuringly at his wife, and walked outside with McGovern. He whistled to his man, and before long the doctor's horse was brought up by Bill, who, with Bob, helped Carlton around the place.

"Don't be too worried about the boy," he said meanwhile to Carlton. "It was a bad dose of colic and he's pretty weak, but the chances



are that he'll pull through all right. Keep him warm, and Mrs. Carlton knows the rest of it. I'm going over to Westley's ranch now, and ought to be home by morning. If the boy isn't better, send one of your men to town, and I'll come right down."

He took the reins of his horse, and waited until Carlton's hired man was beyond hearing distance.

"There's something else," he said significantly, "that I wanted to talk to you about."

"What is it?" inquired John.

"Charley Peters was found dead at the bottom of Thornsett's Creek this morning."

"Not dead? Charley?"

"Shot through the heart," pursued the doctor.

"So that infernal gang's on the war-path again?" asked Carlton rather disgustedly.

"Sure," agreed McGovern earnestly. "They are hitting back, and that was their first punch. But not their last, I tell you. I warn you that they'd do their damndest to get even with you for the lynching of Red Jake."

John grinned, and lit his pipe.

"You're next; I know it," said the doctor.

"You think so?" asked Carlton composedly.

“Why, man,” insisted McGovern, “every one knows that it was a scheme of yours that trapped Red Jake, and that it was your doing that he was lynched. You couldn’t wait to let the law take its course.”

“The law,” snorted Carlton with contempt. “There’s only one law with cattle-thieves, and that’s lynch law. What’s the sense of bringing a man like Red Jake before a judge? A judge who’s quaking in his shoes over a few threatening letters, and a jury packed with the fellow’s pals!”

“I’m not concerned with the administration of the law,” declared the doctor quietly. “Just now, Carlton, I’m concerned with you and that little wife of yours, and your boy.”

“Sorry, Doc,” smiled Carlton, patting McGovern’s arm. “I didn’t mean it that way—you know that. You’re a good chap.”

“Well—and so are you,” insisted McGovern. “And it’s because you are a good chap—and a great deal more—that we don’t want to lose you just yet. You’re a bit of a wonder, you know, John. Two years in Wyoming— isn’t that it? And fresh from the old country at that—and you’ve made your mark already. You’ll go far if you don’t go too quick. Say,”

he questioned suddenly, "how much does your wife know of this business?"

"Nothing—and she never will, I hope."

"That's where you're wrong," calmly said McGovern. "And I dare say you'll tell me that interfering with man and wife isn't a doctor's business. Let me tell you that you're a long way from understanding that little wife of yours."

"What do you mean?" asked John, really angry.

"You treat her like a baby," announced McGovern bluntly. "She's no baby. She's a woman in a thousand, and I'd sooner have that woman of yours as a fighting partner in a tight corner than—the champion heavy-weight of the—the Universe."

"By Jove," admitted Carlton, mollified, "I guess she is rather a bit of a wonder."

"Tell her the whole story," urged the doctor. "Tell her everything. Never keep anything from her. But look here, man; I'm a fine doctor. Get back inside. You'll be a patient of mine, too, if you stay out much longer without a top-coat. But look out, John, and be careful."

He mounted his horse and galloped over the



lonely trail which, after ten miles, if snow did not hinder him, would lead him to Westley's ranch, where Westley himself, he had heard only a few hours before, was badly laid up.

Carlton went into the house, and found Mary sitting before the cradle, waiting hopefully for a baby cry, or a motion of a tiny hand that was other than a spasmodic twitch.

He slammed the door and went over to the "couch," a crude bench, banked with calico-covered pillows. His face was very thoughtful as he sat down and placed his chin in one hand. Mary looked towards him, arose quietly from her chair, and went to her husband.

"John," she asked, "why don't you tell me?"

"Tell you what?" he inquired, raising his head.

"What's on your mind," she answered.

"It's not woman's work," he responded.

"All work is woman's work—when her man's in it," she pronounced decisively.

He thought for a time, and then lifted one hand for her to take.

"Come here, Mary," he asked. She sat down beside him. "Mary, I swore that I'd succeed for you. When I took from you all your soft-



ness and richness, I swore to myself that some day I would give you anything that a woman could want."

"I have it," she said smilingly. "I have your love, and it was only a week ago that you told me that we had a thousand acres of land, three thousand head of cattle, and that you yourself had a wife that you loved, and a wonderful baby boy. What else could we ask for? I have never wanted more than your love—and Baby."

"You haven't a thousandth part of what I'll give you," John replied fervently. "We're only at the beginning. But you and I, Mary, are making fine strides, fine progress. We claimed, by good luck, a wonderful bit of land. You helped me save the money I put into it. We've won what we worked for—we're winning by inches. But—you'll need patience and courage—you'll need courage."

"Patience and courage—yes, John," she answered.

Carlton paused and, after bracing himself for an ordeal, went on, "Mary—you—you know, dear, so much of a man's life is a brutal affair."

"Is it, John?" she asked quietly.

“Yes”—he found it hard to pick his words—  
“and women should be kept out of it. But  
sometimes that’s impossible. You know, dear,  
—I mean, you don’t know, dear—that I’ve made  
enemies as well as friends.”

“That’s only natural. I think I understand.”

She smiled encouragingly at him.

“But you don’t,” he said desperately, “and  
that’s the damnable part of it. How could you  
understand?” he continued with infinite tenderness,  
stroking her hands. He was appalled  
as he saw that the palms were calloused.  
“Mary,” he went on, “it’s hideous to have to  
tell you. You’ll be shocked and horrified.  
You may even loathe me when you know that  
I——”

He stopped abruptly and clenched his fists.  
Mary looked at him inquiringly, and a trace of  
a smile was on her lips.

“John,” she asked naïvely, “are you trying  
to tell me about the lynching of Red Jake and  
his two sons?”

“Good God!” he cried, turning to face her.  
“What do you know about that?”

“Why, I know everything,” she replied, perplexed at his attitude.

“Everything?” he said, dumbfounded.

“Yes, John,” she agreed with an encouraging smile.

“Who told you?”

“Why—Bob told me.”

“He had my orders,” said Carlton slowly and heatedly, “not to breathe a word of the brutal story to you.”

“Yes, I know,” she assented. “But that was after he had told me everything. You mustn’t be angry with poor Bob. He was dreadfully upset when he knew he’d done the wrong thing, and begged me to say nothing. It doesn’t matter, my telling you now, does it, John?”

Carlton rose and walked away from the couch.

“Let’s have the fellow’s yarn,” he urged finally. “What did he tell you?”

Mary looked at him tremulously and began to speak, in utter apology for the man who had told her what her husband had done.

“Oh, John!” she said. “You know what a silent man he is. But when he heard what you had done, he was so proud of his master that he simply poured out the whole story to me. Poor Bob, he naturally thought that his master’s wife would be proud as well.”



“Proud?” sneered Carlton bitterly.

Mary was too absorbed and excited to notice the tone of his voice. Her eyes and her gestures were those of one who was reciting an epic.

“He told me all about those cattle-thieves, and how you had wormed your way into their confidence. How, all alone,” she pursued breathlessly, “you’d gone to Red Jake’s shack in the mountains, with your life in your hands, and tricked him into taking you on as one of his accomplices. That big plan you laid before them of rounding up a whole herd of cattle—Bob told me all about it. Red Jake, whom nobody had ever got the better of—you deceived him and tricked him, and caught him red-handed. Bob said that it was the most wonderful thing that ever happened. He said that if somebody hadn’t blundered, the whole gang would have been captured. And afterwards, the others wanted to hand Red Jake over to the Sheriff, but Bob said you wouldn’t have it. You insisted on hanging them at once. And Red Jake and his two sons were hanged then and there. And it was all your doing. Oh, John, how dreadful it must have been for you. But, oh, I’m so proud of my husband.”



She beamed at him devotedly, her eyes journeying from his head to his feet with the utmost of admiration. He stared at her without comprehending. He had caused the death of three men, and this slip of a wife, who knew little of the rough life that went on beyond the confines of the rectangular wooden fence, believed him a hero.

“Proud of me!” he ejaculated. “Well, if that doesn’t beat all Creation. Proud of me? Good Lord!”

“But, John,” she said simply, “don’t you understand? Any woman would be proud to have a man as strong and brave and—ruthless as you are.”

“I didn’t realize,” he said, scratching his head, and still uncomprehending.

“Of course she would,” Mary asserted. “But, John dear,” she added, “there’s one thing that grieved me dreadfully.”

“Grieved you, sweetheart?” asked Carlton, again astonished.

“Every time you left me,” she accused slowly, “to go to Red Jake’s shack, you told me—a—*story*. An untruth.”

“But, good Heavens, darling,” he protested, more mystified than ever, “I couldn’t possibly

have told you what I was really up to. I had to concoct some kind of a yarn."

"John, dear," she said very gravely, "I don't think there can be any excuse for telling a lie." And as John, who could not help smiling, placed his hand over his mouth, she said severely, "John, this is no laughing matter." He straightened his face with an effort, and she demanded, "Promise me that in the future you'll always—always tell me the truth."

"I promise," he said, more soberly.

"Thank you, dear."

She kissed him rather maternally on the forehead, patted his cheek, and went to the cradle.

"Of course," John admitted, "I ought to have known without McGovern pointing it out that you're the finest fighting partner a man could wish for in a tight corner."

"A tight corner?" she asked, puzzled.



## CHAPTER ELEVEN

BEFORE he could explain, the door was slammed open and Bob, the cowboy, though in dress a nondescript sort of person, rushed into the cabin without knocking.

“Quick, Boss, they’re riding up,” he warned; “and it’s you they’re after.”

“John, John, they’re after you—you! You’re in danger—they want to kill you—oh, I couldn’t bear it,” cried Mary, quickly sensing the situation. “John—John—I couldn’t bear it,” she repeated, sobbing wildly.

Carlton patted her shoulder and ordered Bob, “Tell Bill to go to the west gate and then come back here with me. It may be only a false alarm.”

Bill, who had been waiting outside, ran to the gate as he was ordered, and reached it as a dozen horsemen galloped up furiously. Some of them were armed with rifles; all, it was naturally to be presumed, had pistols and loaded cartridge belts under their outer clothing.

The leader, a square-faced man whose twisted



features became even more repulsive as he spoke, shouted, "We want John Carlton," in response to Bill's challenge. His companions had grim, scowling faces. They were desperate, determined men, at least when led by the powerful brute who was at their head.

"I'll see if he wants you to come in," replied Bill, realizing that Red Jake's band meant business, but bravely trying to gain time.

"Like hell," snorted the leader, drawing his revolver. "We'll go in ourselves and find out whether he wants to see us. And here's something for you." He fired several shots. Bill, panic-stricken, tried to run towards the house. Before he had gone ten yards, he crumpled and fell headlong in the snow. One of the men dismounted, threw open the gate, and the spurred horses dashed towards the cabin.

Meanwhile, both men in the shack had been busy. They had rammed against the windows the solid wooden shutters, braced by bars which fitted tightly into the stout cleats at either side, and had drawn their revolvers and inspected approvingly their available cartridges.

"Baby," cried Mary suddenly. She went to the cradle and picked up her son. "Put out the lights," she suggested. The two men turned

down the oil lamps in a moment, and they flickered and went out. Only the smoldering logs in the fire-place illuminated the room.

Next Carlton swept to the floor the contents of the table; the two men tilted it against the door and strengthened it by moving the heavy oak chest and placing it between the legs of the table.

“Where did you spot ’em?” asked Carlton.

“They were workin’ around the outhouses, I guess,” the man replied, “hopin’ to fix me. But I’d gone ’round, as the missus asked me, to clear the snow from the bedroom winder.”

“How many were there?”

“Couldn’t say for sure. Looked like a dozen at least.”

Carlton opened the wooden slide beside the door and peered out. “They’re coming,” he announced; “I can see them.”

“Bob, you didn’t have time to clear the snow away from the bedroom window?” inquired Mary quietly.

“No, ma’am,” said Bob. “Sorry.”

“Then I’ll take the baby in there and put him in our bed,” Mary told her husband. “That will be the safest.”

"You'll stay in the bedroom, dear," he ordered.

"Yes, John, and please give me a gun."

Her husband handed her one of the several revolvers which he now had beside him and said, "It's fully loaded."

"If I hear them trying to clear away the snow, shall I shoot?" she asked.

"Yes, but they won't. Too risky, darling. Courage," he urged, placing his arm around her and looking tenderly at the sleeping child. The revolver dangled from one of her fingers.

"Yes, John," she said, "and don't worry about me, dear. I'm not the least bit frightened."

She went like a flash to the bedroom, leaving the door slightly ajar.

"Spot anything?" asked Carlton.

"No," said Bob, looking out from the large crack in a shutter.

"Lucky you didn't clear that snow," his employer asserted.

There came the sound of horses and soon a terrific banging on the door. Neither man spoke, though both were tensely ready, revolvers pointed towards the door.

“John Carlton,” came a gruff voice.

“Well?” answered John.

“You’re wanted, so come out,” the voice commanded.

“Come on in,” invited Carlton.

“You come out quiet, and we’ll leave the rest alone. If we’ve got to come in and fetch yer, we don’t leave no witnesses. Get me? Two minutes we give you to come out. Get that?”

“I hear you,” said John, less challengingly.

The two men in the cabin looked at each other and John’s glance turned to the bedroom door. He clutched at his revolver and his face became stern. He pondered the matter like a flash. If he went out and gave himself up, the others would be safe. The cattle rustlers would not casually kill a woman and baby, for such a murder would arouse the whole county. They were drunk now and wanted him only; they had no interest in any one else. Should he refuse to go out, however, he decided, the enraged men would stop at nothing. That meant that Mary would be killed—at best! And Baby. And Bob, of course.

Carlton heard the warning, “*One minute more.*”



“I’ve got to go out,” he told Bob. “You’ll look after the wife and take her and the boy to McGovern, won’t you?”

“Sure, Boss,” agreed the cowboy, shaking his head in despair.

Mary suddenly appeared from the other room, revolver in hand, and went swiftly to her husband.

“John, you’ll fight,” she demanded.

“You heard what they said?” asked Carlton.

“Yes.”

“They mean it,” he warned. “They’d shoot you—they’d have to. And possibly before that——”

“I know,” she replied.

“And the child—they’ll——”

“John, if you go out, I go too,” Mary asserted defiantly. “I—I couldn’t live,” she gasped, “if you gave yourself up to save us—I’d sooner die—I’d sooner Baby died.”

“You will do what I say,” said John grimly.

Mary was shaking from head to foot, but she raised her face stubbornly and said, “I—I expect you to fight for me. I expect my man to fight for me.”

John gave a despairing laugh and turned to his cowboy.

"Bob, what would you do with a wife like that?" he asked.

There came a crash at the door.

"Time's up, John Carlton. Come out," ordered the voice.

"Come and get us if you damned well can," invited the young woman, in a tremulous but defiant voice, opening the shutter to challenge them and then slamming it quickly.

She sent a shot through the door.

"Now you've done it," said Carlton.

"Yes, John," she agreed, terrified, but smiling.

Bob aimed from the lookout shutter at the door and fired twice. The men outside were dragging up a log with which to break down the door.

"First blood," he exulted.

"Got him?" inquired John, taking his place by the front window.

"Yep," said Bob, peering through the tiny slit and trying to pick out a moving figure in the darkness. He shot again, and murmured, "Hell! Missed that one."

"Better luck next time, Bob," encouraged Mary, whose will power alone enabled her to master her fear.

There came the crashing blow of the battering ram against the door. The angle was such that neither Carlton nor Bob could shoot effectively without exposing themselves. The two men stood there in desperation, their revolvers leveled at the door, the bar of which was already weakening. Mary looked on in horror and as she turned away, her glance fell on the cauldron over the fire. Like a flash she picked up a pan, filled it with the steaming water, and ran to the lookout. She threw it open, thrust out her arm, and dashed the contents of the kettle sideways over the besiegers of the door. There came yells and curses from outside as she quickly banged the lookout shut.

“Oh,” she gasped, rather sympathetic when she realized that she had hurt some one. John laughed exultantly, and Mary remarked, this time with timid satisfaction, “The water was—quite boiling, dear.”

The men apparently had left the door, for shots began to riddle the barred openings of the cabin.

“Baby!” cried Mary suddenly, “I must go to him.”

“He’s all right,” said Carlton, who was care-





*A First National Picture.*

MARY HEARS OF HER HUSBAND'S DISLOYALTY FROM HER PARENTS.

*Secrets.*





fully and consistently firing from his post at the window. "Stay where you are."

Mary determinedly went to the bedroom and rushed to the blankets which covered her baby. She leaned over and brought the boy to her arms. His face was so white, she thought, whiter than ever before. She sat down and gazed at it sadly. The poor little baby was so sick. But she remembered that the eye-lids had not twitched as they had earlier in the evening, and that the feverish forehead had become almost cold. Her eyes widened in horror; she asked only for the flush of a cheek, the moving of a finger. Dazedly she stood up and went to the dresser for her hand-mirror. As if to test its efficacy, she breathed on it and it became so clouded that her face was only a distant image. She rubbed the moisture off on her sleeve and, her lips quivering, and her eyes still wide-opened, she placed the mirror before the baby's face. Hopefully, she left it there for several seconds. When she looked at it, the glass was as dry and translucent as it had been before. She dropped the mirror on the floor and lifted the baby to the level of her face. The infinite peace had come, she realized; she had lost her baby boy.

She sat down, snuggling the form against her breast, and rocking to and fro as she had done so many times in the past six months. Sometimes, though the tears rolled down her cheeks and dampened the little blanket, she smiled, and, looking down, crooned a lullaby. Her baby was in her arms, still warm, still snuggled in his blankets. Perhaps in a moment he would open his eyes and smile as he had smiled until yesterday. Perhaps, if she prayed some more, his breath would come again and his cheeks would have the rosy flush that she loved to see. Perhaps—but no! He was no longer the baby who would grow to be a big boy and run outside with Papa and with Bob and Bill.

Baby had gone, but Mary sat there, her body swaying mechanically. She would never let any one take from her that fragile form. She would sit forever and pray or sing, in the hope that he would sometime open his little eyes. There was nothing else for her to do—ever.

Bob had been hit twice. One bullet disabled his right hand and he picked up his revolver and painfully filled and refilled it, shooting now with his left. Another shot splintered the wood before him and a flow of blood gushed from his

head. He tried vainly to get up, and Carlton, in desperation, left his post, from which he had fired cartridge after cartridge, and helped him to his feet.

“All right, Boss,” Bob assured him, blinking his eyes, and cheerfully propping himself against a chair so that he could continue to shoot.

“I don’t think I can stand it,” John said hoarsely. “I can’t risk that angel in there being butchered. I’m going to give myself up.”

“No, you don’t,” said Bob vehemently.

“What the hell do you mean?” asked Carlton.

“I’ve shot a couple of their men, and if they come in here they’ll lynch us all, just as you lynched Red Jake and——”

There came a volley of shots and a plate on the dresser crashed to the floor in pieces. A canister dropped off the mantelpiece a moment later.

“We can’t get ’em with these here revolvers,” decreed Bob. “Some of ’em are over on the ridge with rifles.”

Another volley came and a shutter at the side window crashed at the same time. The two men frantically pumped bullets into the darkness. Through the opening cautiously crawled



a man. Carlton, standing at his window and intent on the ground before him, did not observe him.

The crash of the shutter brought Mary Carlton from her mournful reverie. She placed the body of the baby on the bed, rubbed her forehead in an effort to recall the present circumstances, and brushed away the tears from her moistened eyes. On seeing the revolver on the dresser she picked it up involuntarily and looked at it. Then she remembered. John was fighting for her and she must help him. She walked dazedly towards the door, looked through the slight opening. She saw at the extreme end of the room a man, bearded, uncouth, with wicked determination in his eyes. He was watching John. Slowly he raised the rifle which he carried and leveled it at Carlton.

Mary seized the door and opened it. She raised her revolver, took careful aim and fired. The rifle clattered to the floor and the strange man fell in a heap. Carlton and Bob looked around in amazement, and first saw the prone body of the intruder. Then John looked towards the bedroom and saw his wife, the revolver wavering in her hand. She dropped the weapon and stood there, supporting herself

weakly against the wall. Carlton rushed to her and took her in his arms.

“Why, Mary,” he said, “you must have—why—you saved my life.”

“Yes, John,” she said, smiling faintly. “I’m so glad I could help.”

“Hooray!” cried Bob without warning. “Here come the boys. Hooray!”

“What do you mean?” asked Carlton, incredulous.

“I can see ’em. Can’t you hear the horses? And how them murderers are skedaddling.”

“Mary, do you hear? We are saved!” Carlton asked the limp form in his arms.

“Yes, John,” she said; “now I’ll go back to Baby.”

She went to the bedroom again and Carlton excitedly opened the front door and looked out. Ten men with rifles were before the house. Five horses, riderless, stood patiently in the snow, proof of the accurate aim of Bob and John Carlton and his wife. The remainder of Red Jake’s gang had dashed away as they heard the approach of the rescue party.

“All right, John?” asked some one whose voice Carlton could not distinguish in the darkness.

“Bob’s a little smashed up and Bill must have been knocked out at the gate. Otherwise we’re in good shape. Come on in, boys.”

“Can’t. McGovern rounded us up to get this crowd and we’re going to finish ’em up. Good night, John.”

He wheeled his horse around, dug in the spurs and disappeared towards the west gate, followed by his companions.

“I’d go if the baby wasn’t sick,” said John, rather regretfully.

“Lord, Boss, haven’t you had enough fighting for one day? What a man,” he added in despair.

Carlton made an attempt to place the furniture in order and then went to the bedroom. He found Mary sitting there, rocking her baby in the straight chair and singing softly a lullaby. Her eyes were dull, and now and then a tear rolled aimlessly down her face. She did not see him, though he was straight before her.

“What’s the trouble, Mary?” he asked anxiously. “Everything’s all right now; they’ve gone, and the boys are after them. I’m afraid the excitement was too much for you.”

She gave him a pathetic smile of half-recog-

niton and fastened her gaze on the face of her boy.

“You are so wonderful, Mary,” he pursued, not realizing the cause of her sorrow.

She shook her head slightly, looked at him and then down at the baby.

“Baby— isn’t he all right?” Carlton asked apprehensively.

She nodded sadly, the tears bursting from her eyes.

“You don’t mean—is it too late to get McGovern?” he cried.

“Yes, John,” she said.





## CHAPTER TWELVE

BIRTHDAYS always made Mary Carlton reminiscent. Ever since her marriage, John had spent as much of the day as possible with her, and they had talked of other years. As the children grew up, they came to take more and more part in the ceremony, which started with storytelling, and was inevitably followed by a birthday cake and other much appreciated dainties.

Mary Carlton was forty years old to-day. She sat before the fire, which cast a pleasant glow over the massive drawing-room of the house on Porchester Terrace, a photograph album on her lap. Sitting on the floor, her hands resting on her mother's knees, was ten-year-old Audrey. Blanche, three years older, stood behind the arm-chair, listening intently to every word that her mother said. Robert, equally interested, but much more comfortable than his younger sisters, squatted, cross-legged, on the hearth-rug, while seventeen-year-old John stood by the window, his hands in his

pockets, intent on the conversation, but with an air of detachment which befitted his advanced age and new swallow-tailed coat.

“Yes—and then, Mother?” asked Audrey breathlessly.

“It was just at that moment,” her mother went on, most dramatically, “when everything looked lost, that Bob, who was at the window, caught sight of our friends coming to the rescue. I heard your dear father cry out, ‘We’re saved!’ and then I fainted away.”

Blanche wriggled with delicious excitement.

“Yes, Mamma—and then?”

“None of us would be sitting here to-day if those brave fellows had come up a few minutes later,” Lady Carlton continued. “The cattle thieves had already broken one of the shutters.”

“But I say, Mamma,” broke in Robert, “what had Papa done to those chaps that they had such a down on him?”

His mother hesitated, and then explained very cautiously.

“Well, you see, dear, a few months before, your father had been obliged to punish some of their ring-leaders very severely.”

“But, Mamma,” inquired Audrey, “what

were you doing all through the fight? Weren't you dreadfully frightened?"

"I was looking after your little brother, dear," she explained gently, "the one whom you never saw. He was only six months old when—that day."

"I bet you got in bed with him and covered your head with the bed-clothes. That's what I'd have done," asserted Blanche.

"Well, Mamma didn't," protested John indignantly. "If it hadn't been for her, they'd all have been murdered."

"But, Johnny, dear——" broke in his mother, startled.

"And what do you know about it?" Robert challenged his brother. "You weren't there."

John smiled tolerantly.

"No, I wasn't there, but I know all about it," he declared. He looked at the younger children with a superior air. "As a matter of fact, Papa told me the whole story years ago, but I promised I wouldn't speak of it until you kids were older."

"Oh, did he really?" mocked Robert, and, encouraged by Blanche's giggles, insisted, "Do tell us all about it—big brother."

He snickered, and his mother's face flushed.



“I didn’t know that your father told you of the incident, dear,” she said. “Of course, Wyoming was a very rough country in those days and—things happened which—which we’d better not talk about to-day.”

“All right, Mamma; don’t be scared,” John assured her rather patronizingly. “I won’t give away all the gory details.”

“I say, why not?” asked Robert abruptly, instantly forgetting his intended slur of a moment ago.

“Yes, why not?” asked Blanche eagerly.

“Yes, really, Mamma,” John broke in again. “I really don’t see why we shouldn’t know that you”—he extended his hand towards her with a masterful gesture—“were the heroine of the scrap. It was Mamma,” he went on, seeing that Lady Carlton’s intended look of rebuke had turned to a blush of embarrassment, “who had the bright idea of pitching boiling water on the fellers and——”

“That will do, Johnny, please,” his mother interrupted. “Let’s forget the whole ugly story. I can’t think what started us on it. I’m sure your dear father——”

“But it wasn’t ugly,” protested Blanche, now in a seventh heaven of delight; “it’s

lovely. And on your birthday, you always tell us lovely stories—all about your wild past.”

“I say, Mamma,” asked the now outraged Robert, “why didn’t you tell us about your part in the fight? You made out you were kissing and cuddling the baby, when all the time you were pitching boiling water on the terrible invaders.”

“Shut up,” ordered John sternly.

He walked to his mother, leaned over her chair, and put his hands lightly on her shoulders.

“It’s a shame to tease you—and on your birthday, too,” he said seriously. “But we really can’t allow you to be so modest. Now own up. It was you who suggested the boiling water, wasn’t it? Now own up.”

“Own up—own up,” repeated the four children together.

“You silly children,” laughed Lady Carlton. “You darlings—all four of you.” She smiled happily at them.

Mary, on her fortieth birthday, looked even more beautiful than she had when she was eighteen, for her natural loveliness was enhanced by a glow of happiness and love. Her still luxuriant dark hair, which she wore in a

coronet braid in accordance with the current mode, showed silver here and there, but her eyes were girlishly bright, and her skin marvelously smooth.

As Lady Carlton, she could afford the most fashionable creations of the leading modistes, and to-day, to celebrate her birthday, she was wearing a new Paris gown of primrose yellow satin and lustrous black velvet, draped into the very latest of bustles.

Her children watched her admiringly, and seemed to have forgotten the myriad of questions which they had been about to ask. Lady Carlton looked about her and smiled faintly as she thought of the scene of the fight which so glowingly interested her children. What a contrast there was between her present surroundings and the rough floors, hand-hewn furniture and bear-skin rugs of the cabin in Wyoming.

Here was a stately room in a great mansion of Porchester Terrace. Rich mulberry-colored curtains framed the coming twilight. Above the glowing logs was a ponderous carved mantel, and the vast fire-place itself was bordered by exquisite wood carvings. The furniture was rich and heavy, typical of the



Victorian era, but it suited admirably the Gothic expanse of the room and changed it from a church-like hall to a comfortable living-room. But such furnishings as horsehair chairs with the inevitable antimacassars, the waxed flowers, grotesque groups of ornamental figures, that were in almost every English drawing-room of the period, were not in Sir John Carlton's house. Something that had made his wife love the natural crudities of the cabin in Wyoming caused her to rebel against the artificial crudities which were in vogue on her return to England and which remained popular for many years. She was loved everywhere, but looked upon as rather an extremist when it came to home decoration.

Mary turned as the doors suddenly opened, and a servant entered unannounced. There was the suspicion of a grin on his usually expressionless face as he bore proudly before him a cake, with mountainous frosting, and lighted with tiny candles. Completely ignoring the presence of the mistress of the house, and plainly following the orders of young John Carlton, he placed the flaming cake on a table and quietly withdrew.

Lady Carlton looked down at her birthday



cake and read the elaborate sugared inscription, "To Our Darling Mummy." She had never previously been embarrassed before her children, but now her chin quivered, and her lips were unsteady as she smiled.

"My own darlings," she whispered, looking from one to another of the triumphant children with glistening eyes. "Thank you so much. I only wish that Papa were here," she added.

"He sent word that he would be late," remarked John, his happy and superior expression giving way to solemn features.

"Oh—I'm so sorry," said his mother, trying to hide her disappointment. "He said that he would be here as always—and I had hoped——" She looked at the puzzled faces about her, and added gaily, "but I must blow out the candles, all in one breath, and if I can do it, we shall all be happy for another year."

The two younger children watched her successful effort with appreciation, and even John showed mild interest as she took the big silver knife and started to cut the cake. Before long, all five were laughing between mouthfuls of the cook's masterpiece, and shortly afterwards

Blanche and Audrey were clamoring for a second slice. Mary wondered if they should have it, but it was her birthday, and she could not even contemplate a refusal.



## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE doors at the end of the room opened again, and the servant appeared, announcing, "Mr. and Mrs. Marlowe—Miss Channing."

"Oh, golly," moaned Robert.

Mary Carlton sprang up and cried, "How delightful," not noticing the discouraged looks on the faces of her children.

She went towards the door to meet her mother and her aunt.

"Dear Mamma," she said, embracing Mrs. Marlowe.

"Many happy returns of the day, my child," chanted her mother.

"Many happy returns of the day," said Mr. Marlowe.

"Thank you, Papa," she said—"Dear Auntie!"

Miss Channing put her arms around the younger woman with a fervor that was reminiscent of years ago. "My darling," she whispered; "my darling Mary."

Mary's mother was dressed in uncompromis-



ing, steel-gray taffeta, and with her Paisley shawl precisely folded over her arm she rustled down the drawing-room towards the children, followed closely by Marlowe and Miss Channing. She immediately kissed Audrey and turned her cheek to Blanche.

“Well, my lad?” inquired Marlowe of Robert.

“How-de-do, Grandpa?” returned the boy listlessly.

“Come to Grandma,” ordered Mrs. Marlowe, and he approached her with woeful lack of enthusiasm. “Now give Grandma a kiss,” she urged, offering her cheek. He pecked at it perfunctorily and retreated, to give way to John, who seemed to realize that the ordeal would soon be over, and gingerly touched his lips against her cheek. Then both boys sighed.

“And how are you, young man?” inquired Marlowe of John.

“Thank you, Sir—first rate,” he replied with a half-smile. His grandfather sometimes seemed like a rather good old sort, he suggested to himself, and he certainly didn’t muss one as his grandmother did.

Miss Channing had been whispering eagerly to Mary.

“Do you know, darling,” she finally said aloud, “you don’t look a day older than when you ran away to marry dear John.”

“Really, Eliza!” protested Mrs. Marlowe, who had returned to Blanche and seemed about to kiss her again, “and before the children, too!”

“And why shouldn’t the children know what a plucky and sensible little mother they have?” demanded Miss Channing.

Mary stood by helplessly. Since she had come back from America, the wife of a rich man, she had never been able to enter into arguments with her family, or even suggest that arguments were out of place in her own house.

“Oh, Auntie,” Audrey said, “Mamma has told us all about her runaway match.”

Mrs. Marlowe was so decidedly shocked that she could only ejaculate, “Child!”

“And you can’t hear of it often enough,” interpolated Miss Channing.

“My, that must have been a lark,” said the appreciative Blanche.

“Lark?” coughed Marlowe.

“Lark, indeed?” inquired his wife disapprovingly. “Little ladies don’t use such words.”

Mary waited until the three visitors had taken seats, and then sat down in her arm-chair.

"It was very sweet of you and Papa," she said gratefully, addressing her mother, "to send me that old book of family photographs. It was such a lovely present—so generous of you. For I know how much you value it."

"Yes, my dear, we certainly did," agreed her mother.

"And that, Mary, was our reason for giving it to you," Marlowe added hastily.

"We thought it would be a nice thing for you and the children to look at on Sunday afternoons," Mrs. Marlowe explained.

"How jolly," remarked Robert, shaking his head.

Marlowe meanwhile was amusing himself by jogging the martyred Blanche up and down on his knees. Mary surveyed the situation and asked hastily.

"Mamma, dear, won't you have some tea—and you, Auntie?"

"Thank you, Mary, but we had tea before we left home," Mrs. Marlowe replied.

"Then, Papa, you'll have a glass of sherry and a biscuit?" Mary asked her father.

"Not the biscuit," he replied, with a cau-



tious glance towards his wife, "but I might have a little sherry." Noticing no disapproval of his willingness to take refreshment alone, he added:

"Yes, I'm sure I should like a small glass of sherry."

Robert, at his mother's nod, rang the bell for the servant, and the children launched into a description of the fine birthday party that they had just had with mother. There had been a cake, Audrey related, with white frosting and lots of candles. There was considerable argument concerning the number of pieces that each had had. Mary sat by, distressed, but as always when her mother was present, waiving her authority.

"In my days," Mrs. Marlowe asserted, "little ladies and gentlemen were not expected to speak until they were spoken to. And they certainly never bickered in front of their elders."

"No, indeed, but since our young days," Miss Channing reminded tartly, "the times have been steadily improving."

"Really, Eliza, I'm astonished that——"

Mrs. Marlowe noticed that the servant was opening the door, and coughed.



“A glass of sherry, please,” ordered Lady Carlton.

“And your feet on the floor, Robert,” enjoined Mrs. Marlowe.

“Mamma, dear,” said Mary, with a trace of shyness, “I don’t know whether you’ve noticed how my hands glitter to-day.”

She held out her hands, smiling; almost every finger on each hand was covered with rings.

“I had noticed, my dear,” Mrs. Marlowe replied, “but I thought it would be kinder to say nothing about it.”

Miss Channing rose in indignation from her chair.

“If I had such beautiful rings,” she asserted, “I should wear them every day. Even on Sunday.” Mary laughed heartily. “Yes, I would,” she said with defiant emphasis, facing her sister. “I’d go to church with them—outside my gloves.”

“I don’t go quite as far as that, Auntie,” laughed Mary. “It’s only in strict privacy, and on great occasions like to-day that I—shall I say glitter? I’ve a lot more beautiful rings like them. And each of them marks a great step in our fortune. John has always



*A First National Picture.*

"I'LL PROTECT MY MOTHER FROM YOU, MRS. MANWARING."

*Secrets.*



given me a ring whenever he brought off something really big. This, for instance,"—she stretched out the fourth finger of her right hand—"this square cut emerald. John gave it to me last year when he was knighted."

"And when, consequently," volunteered Miss Channing, "you were forgiven for marrying him."

"Eliza, I must protest," said Marlowe, rising wrathfully. "You know as well as I do that I have always said that John would do great things."

Mary quickly placed her hand over her mouth to hide a smile, and her mother told Miss Channing tartly, "John's knighthood had nothing to do with it, Eliza, as you know perfectly well."

"No, no, of course not, Mamma, dear," pacified Mary. She got up from her chair and went to her mother. "But the loveliest ring of all, Mamma," she said softly, "I wear around my neck. Here it is."

She pulled a thin chain from her bosom and handed the ring at the end of it to Mrs. Marlowe. She scrutinized it so carefully that she failed even to notice the servant who entered and brought Marlowe his glass of sherry.



“But, my dear,” she cried in astonishment, “this is only a garnet.”

“Yes, Mamma,” Mary said, smiling.

“And set in silver at that,” asserted Marlowe.

“And it cost only four dollars,” Mary went on, her eyes dreamily cast upward. “John rode forty miles to get it after we’d sold the first calf bred on our ranch.”

“Very pretty, very pretty sentiment, I’m sure,” said Marlowe. “Ha-ha—first calf bred on your ranch.” He drank his sherry and gave the glass back to the servant. “And look at him to-day,” he continued. “Now you can’t take up a paper without seeing John’s name in it somewhere. He really has become a most remarkable man.”

“Become!” sniffed Miss Channing. “The most remarkable thing that he ever did was to fall in love with your daughter—though you naturally didn’t appreciate it at the time.”

Marlowe loftily ignored her.

“A great man,” he murmured. “He appears to have a finger in every pie. I’ve heard it whispered on good authority that a—a certain exalted person—well, the Marquis of Salisbury, to be exact, had advised Her Maj-

esty to include his name in the New Year's Honors' list for a peerage—or at least a baronetcy."

"Oh, Mamma," broke in Audrey, "how lovely!"

"Just fancy Papa with a crown on," remarked Blanche.

Robert became vastly enthusiastic. He jumped up in his chair and shouted, "Three cheers for old Salisbury—hip—hip——"

His mother merely smiled, but on seeing his grandmother's glare, Robert subsided at once and sat down, waiting resignedly for the rebuke that he knew would come.

"Robert," Mrs. Marlowe explained, "worldly honors are all very well in their way—but they are not everything. Mary," she said, turning sternly towards her daughter, "your Papa and I would like to have a little talk with you alone. Perhaps the children will show their Auntie all the nice presents that you have received to-day."

"But, Mamma," protested Mary, very embarrassed, "I—I can't very well ask Auntie to——"

"Darling, don't mind me," Miss Channing assured her, rising. "I would rather be any-

where than in the same room with your Mamma when she starts one of her 'little talks'! Come, children, where are these birthday presents?"

"In the school-room. I'll show you," offered Audrey, running to her.

"Does Mamma inflict little talks on you, Audrey?" asked Miss Channing pointedly, as they walked towards the door.

"Why, no, Auntie," the little girl said, surprised. "Why?"

"Lucky child," Miss Channing asserted, very audibly, and they went through the door, followed by the two other children.

"Jealousy is a terrible affliction, isn't it, dear?" sighed Mrs. Marlowe.

"Jealousy, Mamma?" inquired Mary.

"Yes, jealousy. Your poor aunt has never quite forgiven me for marrying and having a child of my own."

"Eliza is a spiteful, soured old spinster," put in Marlowe vigorously.

"I wouldn't quite say that, William," returned his wife reluctantly, "but still——"

"Just so," agreed Marlowe.

Mary Carlton was so accustomed to these almost hourly tirades that she had no thought of contradicting her parents.



“I love Auntie,” was her quiet remark.

“Dear Mary,” her mother returned benevolently, “she does make an absurd fuss about you, doesn’t she? And she always tried to create mischief between us. Now, dear,” she continued, changing her tone, “now for our little talk.”

She sat down, and Mary took a chair opposite her. Mrs. Marlowe began to speak, as though she were reciting a parable. Her normally stern countenance became funereal.

“You know, Mary,” she began sweetly, “there are no two people in the world who rejoice more than your Papa and myself at the— the outward success of your marriage. And your four children—though I’m afraid you rather spoil them still. And your wealth, your beautiful house, and the honors which are so obviously coming to you. But, my dear, dear child——” she lapsed into a melancholy, sympathetic voice.

“Alice!” interrupted Marlowe. “As I’ve told you before, I don’t believe that it’s any business of ours to——”

“Please, William,” his wife exhorted decisively.

“No, I’ll be——”



“William,” Mrs. Marlowe said with a tone of finality, “that will do.”

He sat down with a grunt, very ill at ease.

“Now, dear,” Mrs. Marlowe began again, “we’ve been wondering lately if behind all this splendor and success our little daughter is really and truly happy.” Her flinty eyes tried to beam with motherliness.

“Why, of course,” Lady Carlton replied wonderingly. “I really think,” she asserted with a burst of enthusiasm, “that I must be the happiest woman in London.”

“That settles it, Alice,” Marlowe announced decisively, getting up from his chair. “That’s all we wanted to be sure about.”

“No, William,” rebuked his wife; “that’s not quite all.”

Marlowe was swayed between embarrassment and indignation.

It was apparent that he wished to be miles away.

“Confound it all, Alice,” he interjected, “this may, after all, be nothing but a piece of idle gossip. The amount of tittle-tattle that goes on in your drawing-room——”

“I was under the impression, William,” his wife interrupted sharply, “that this bit of ‘tit-

tle-tattle,' as you elegantly describe it, was first brought home by you from your club."

"H'm," muttered Marlowe defensively.

"Ah, well, even at the club I've known men to talk scandal."

"William!" cried Mrs. Marlowe. He shrugged his shoulders hopelessly and sat down. Mary, meanwhile, had become more and more astonished at the conversation of her parents, but there came a subtle change in her quiet voice as she asked gravely:

"Just what is it that you want to tell me, Mamma?"

Mrs. Marlowe sighed, rolled her eyes with an expression of hopeful piety, and leveled them sadly at her daughter.

"The world you live in, child," she related, "this big, gay world, is full of pitfalls and temptations for the inexperienced. And, after all, dear, your husband was no more born into it than you. And in his position——"

"So it's my husband you are speaking of?" inquired Mary in a taut voice.

"Of course," Mrs. Marlowe admitted deprecatingly, "there may be nothing to it, but your Papa has heard, and I, too, have heard, that his name has recently been coupled with that

of a certain lady whose reputation, I regret to say—well, I know for a fact that our dear Queen has absolutely refused to receive her. And not only that——”

She spoke almost triumphantly when her daughter remarked with decision,

“Thank you, Mamma, I’m sure you mean very well. I don’t think we’ll pursue the subject any further, if you don’t mind.”

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

LADY CARLTON was deeply hurt. She had not failed to notice John's apathy during the past few months, but, as on previous occasions, her faith was supreme that some day he would return to her with the love that she knew so well. Whispers had come to her from avowedly well-meaning persons, but she had dismissed them with a lofty gesture. So often, she had told herself hopefully, a slight indiscretion on the part of a man, a moment of thoughtlessness, were misconstrued. And then people talked, half the time without cause or reason. It was humiliating, however, to have her own parents who, in years past, had thought so little of John, bring to her reports that were being bandied about the clubs and drawing-rooms.

Mrs. Marlowe was frankly offended at her daughter's attitude. She had a great piece of news to offer, and it was abruptly halted before she had even begun to tell it. She could not quite understand Mary's poise at the moment; her daughter, even after her return from Amer-



ica, and her recent return to family grace, had rather pleasingly bowed to her and to her decisions. She realized that she could scarcely force conversation in her daughter's own house after this rebuff, and, although she was extremely nettled, she decided that she must yield gracefully, though she could not prevent showing it, very resentfully. Her daughter, rich and prominent though she might be, had made her own bed, and now she must lie on it. This was certainly the last time that she would ever interfere in the matter of domestic troubles. After this—though Mary might regret it—she would keep to herself any talk that might come to her about Sir John Carlton, who, after all, caused the family no little disgrace many years ago.

“Very well, my dear,” she agreed. “I’ve no wish to say another word. It was only by earnest wish and prayer that I could bring myself to mention this unpleasant matter at all; but since you don’t think it worth while to listen to your mother——”

The servant opened the doors at the end of the room and announced,

“Mrs. Eustace Mainwaring.”

Marlowe, who a moment ago had given a

huge sigh of relief at the turn of affairs, muttered, "Good God!"

"Really," cried Mrs. Marlowe in an outraged voice. She exchanged amazed glances with her husband, and drew herself up haughtily. "I am afraid that we shall have to go," she announced, as Mrs. Mainwaring came into the room, resplendent in apple-green silk.

She was a strikingly handsome woman in the late thirties, and the exact antithesis to Mary in personal appearance. She was blonde, with luxuriant, straight-combed golden hair, and light blue eyes which seemed to take in everything about her as they flashed and snapped with frank interest. Mrs. Mainwaring was taller than anyone in the room, but exquisite contours made one forget her stateliness. Her eyes were rather too bold and inquiring, and tiny facial lines seemed to be hardened—those were her only apparent faults as one saw her for the first time.

She glanced at the family group, and walked confidently towards Mary, who had risen as she entered.

"How do you do, Lady Carlton?" she said.

"How do you do?" Mary returned graciously.

“Then you remember me?” the visitor asked.

“Oh, yes, quite well. May I introduce my mother, Mrs. Marlowe, Mrs. Mainwaring?”

In response to Mrs. Mainwaring’s polite exclamation of greeting, Mrs. Marlowe primly nodded her head. Marlowe, on being introduced, was much more cordial, however. Mary immediately had the situation in hand.

“We’ve been having a great family event,” she said, in laughing explanation. “You see, it’s my birthday, and we’re all celebrating it. Do sit down.”

“William,” urged Mrs. Marlowe, who had been edging towards the door, with specious disapproval of her husband’s interest in the newcomer.

“You’re not going already, Mamma?” Mary asked.

“Yes, dear,” her mother replied; “I don’t care to leave the horses waiting in this cold weather. We have had such an interesting afternoon.”

She nodded curtly to Mrs. Mainwaring, and left the room, followed by her husband.

“Please excuse me for a moment,” asked Lady Carlton, immediately. “I always like to go to the door with my parents. They are old-



fashioned enough to appreciate greatly such little attentions.

“Of course,” Mrs. Mainwaring replied.

She got up, and went to gaze into the glowing embers of the fire-place. She was rather perplexed to see John’s wife so composed, and when her parents were there, too. Of course, there could not have been a scene, but she expected that that dainty woman would at least have shown some sign of concern when she was announced. Lady Carlton knew; John had told her so. She did not notice the young John Carlton, who had quietly come into the room, until he spoke to her.

“Mrs. Mainwaring, I believe,” he said, with youthful brusqueness, and a decided touch of importance.

She turned and looked at him.

“Yes—and you’re—Johnny?” she asked, with a smile, appraising the handsome boy before her.

“I’m—John Carlton,” he corrected.

“Oh, I beg pardon,” she resumed, in meek apology; “Mr. John Carlton. You see,” she explained carelessly, “your father has so often told me of his son, John, that it slipped out un-awares. I’m sorry.” She paused and, as he



made no reply, went on, "You're not in the least like your father."

"No—Mrs. Mainwaring—I hope you will not——"

She quickly sensed the serious hostility in his tone, and made an effort to avert any outbreak until Lady Carlton should come back into the room and take command of the situation.

"I saw you the other day riding in the park," she said lightly, smiling at him. "I don't suppose you noticed me. You were having a good deal of trouble with your mount—and I thought you managed the situation beautifully. So many people lose their tempers with a nervy horse." He seemed about to speak, and she added quickly, "But that wasn't the last time I saw you."

"No?" inquired John politely, though he was very anxious to speak at length to her.

"It was at the Star and Garter," she pursued hastily. "You remember? You came in with a jolly party just as your father and I were leaving. I wanted to meet you, but we were in such a hurry that——"

"Mrs. Mainwaring," interrupted John desperately, "why do you come here?"

“Well,” she laughed, “if that isn’t just like your father. He has the disconcerting habit of firing rude questions at you like pistol shots. It’s taken the best part of a year to——”

“I suppose that you’ve come to see my mother,” John said doggedly.

“Well?” the lady asked, somewhat loftily.

“Why?” insisted John.

“You’re very rude, Mr. Carlton,” she returned.

“I—I’m sorry—I don’t want to be rude,” he said, abashed. “But does my father know that you are here?”

“What do you mean by asking such questions?” She faced him angrily, and noticed that the square chin which she knew so well in his father was desperately set.

“I have to think of my mother,” he cried. “You won’t ask me to believe that you’re visiting her with my father’s consent. In—in spite of everything—I know him better than that. You’ve no—no right to be here, Mrs. Mainwaring.” The woman rose angrily from her chair and stood before him. “And I ask you to go before my mother comes back,” he insisted.

“How dare you!” she cried, in a fury.

“I must protect my mother,” the boy replied with determination. “There’s no one else here to do it.”

Mrs. Mainwaring forgot that she was talking to a youth.

“Other women beside your mother have a right to protection,” she declared breathlessly.

“Not women like you,” he asserted, with boyish scorn.

“Women—like—me!” She whispered the words angrily. Then she laughed. “Women like me—you’re a man of such experience,” she mocked. “How old are you? Sixteen, isn’t it?”

“That’s neither here nor there,” he said, earnestly. “But, as a matter of fact, I’m over seventeen.”

“Not really!” She laughed and imitated his voice. “Women like me!”

He stood there with clenched fists; he wanted to strike her. There was a pause, and with a change of voice, she asked:

“What do you know about your father and me?”

“What everybody does,” he replied dully.

“Everybody?”

“Yes,” he said, “everybody.”



“Everybody?” she repeated. “Then she—she knows—your mother?”

“Mother?” he cried horrified. “No! Good God, no! And she must be kept from knowing at all costs. She knows nothing of that side of life. She’s always been shielded and protected,” he explained earnestly. “It would break her heart if she ever knew that father——” He stopped, and then went on pleadingly, “Mrs. Mainwaring!”

At that moment Mary came into the room.

“I’m so sorry to have been obliged to run away,” she apologized. She moved to the table to take up her crewelwork. “It must be a year since we last met,” she resumed.

“Oh, quite that,” Mrs. Mainwaring replied, with a tinge of insolence.

“Do sit down,” urged Mary. “And have you been abroad?”

“No—unless you call Scotland abroad. I was there last August. I met your husband, as I daresay he told you.”

“Not that I remember,” Mary said calmly. “Johnny, dear,” she said, turning towards her son, “will you please tell Blanche that it’s high time she began practicing? Mrs. Mainwaring,” she went on, “do you remember, as



a child, the utter boredom of those endless scales?"

"Scales?" inquired the visitor rather nervously. "Oh, on the piano. Dreadful, weren't they?"

"Mother," cried John urgently.

"Tell the child," directed Mary in a tone of gentle dismissal, "that she needn't practice more than half an hour, because it's my birthday."

John paused for a moment, and then accepted the inevitable.

"All right, Mother." He bowed stiffly to Mrs. Mainwaring, and with a "Good-by," left the room.

Lady Carlton took up her work, and with exquisite composure, remarked,

"Some women of my age dislike their birthdays. I don't. I shouldn't mind a bit if I had two a year. It's so delightful to come down in the morning and find the table piled with letters and presents."

"A table groaning with checks and jewelry would hardly reconcile me to a birthday," Mrs. Mainwaring replied with a hard, nervous laugh.

"Are you serious?" asked Lady Carlton.

"Horribly so."

“And yet, you are a young woman—younger than I,” pursued Mary. “I’m forty to-day. Would you say so to look at me?”

“I really don’t know,” parried her visitor dubiously. “No—I shouldn’t. But then, of course, I know that you have a boy who is almost a man, so you must be.”

“I was very young when I married,” Lady Carlton explained. “Probably you’ve heard that my husband and I eloped when he was twenty-one and I was barely eighteen.”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Mainwaring, “I’ve heard something of the sort. Awfully romantic!”

“Wasn’t it?” returned Lady Carlton.

“And romance must be jolly—to look back upon.”

“Oh, but I don’t look back upon mine,” protested Mary naïvely. She smiled sweetly. “You see,” she went on, “I feel my romance still to be with me, and I’m looking forward to more than I can look back upon. I’m afraid,” she said, with a little laugh, “that you’ll think me very silly and sentimental for a woman of my age.”

“I should rather say optimistic,” Mrs. Mainwaring returned, apparently realizing that this was the time for her to throw down the gauge,

if she were ever to do it. "And blind," she added.

"Blind?" inquired Mary gravely.

"Yes, Lady Carlton," she reiterated, "blind."

"Blind? I believe that I understand what you mean, but——"

"No, you don't understand," contradicted Mrs. Mainwaring excitedly, "but I intend that you shall."

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

“I HAVE been wondering why you came here to-day,” Lady Carlton said with frank surprise. “Your visit was certainly unexpected. But I may not be as blind as you think, Mrs. Mainwaring.”

“What do you mean by that?” her visitor asked.

“Why,” returned Lady Carlton, “it’s over a year since we met. I called on you shortly afterwards. You have never returned my call until to-day.”

“No—but——”

“And do you really suppose that I don’t know why you?”—Mary laughed with a trace of bitterness—“dropped me?”

“Then—you know?” Mrs. Mainwaring asked eagerly. “But your son told me just now——”

“My son?” inquired Lady Carlton, admirably imposing. “How dared you to speak about this to my son?”

“No—no—I beg of you to believe me. I didn’t speak to him. It was he—he didn’t want me to meet you. He asked me to leave the



house. He—he said——” she paused in confusion.

“Well?” inquired Lady Carlton.

“He said that everybody knew about—about your husband and me—everybody but you. He said you knew nothing.”

“Johnny said that,” pondered Mary, half to herself. Then, drawing herself up with supreme dignity, she announced, “If you came here with the intention of hurting me, Mrs. Mainwaring, you’ve succeeded. It’s very bitter to me that my son should know of his father’s sin.”

“I—I didn’t mean to hurt you,” the other woman said, almost ashamed. “But now,” she went on recklessly, with a sudden burst of passion, “I’m glad to hurt you. Who are you to sit in judgment on him? ‘His sin—my sin,’ you say. What is sin? Who are you to have the whole life of a man like that? You’ve never lived and understood. You’re cold; you’re faithful and good and dutiful. Duty—yes, it’s your duty to keep him chained up to you; it’s your duty to deny him the joy and freedom and—passion he was born for. Oh, it’s not women like me—it’s women like *you* who ruin men and break their hearts and lives.”

Mary had sat there, looking before her, during this outburst. Mrs. Mainwaring stood up and walked toward the door slowly and wearily, her passion spent.

Lady Carlton followed her quickly, and, before she had opened the door, demanded,

“Mrs. Mainwaring, you didn’t come here to-day to tell me about all that. What have you come to see me about?”

Mrs. Mainwaring stopped shortly, hesitated for a moment, and then announced, “My husband is divorcing me. John—Sir John—will be cited as co-respondent. We’re not defending it—there’s really no defense—except love.”

She paused defiantly, tossing her head, and watching every move of the woman before her.

“Love? Love?” Mary mused wonderingly. “So that’s why you have come here?” she asked abruptly. “To tell me that my husband is in love with you—that he—loves you?”

“Yes,” her visitor whispered vehemently. “And to ask you to—to let him go. Without your consent, he’ll never leave you. He won’t even ask you to let him go. He says it’s useless—that you’d never give him his freedom, no matter what he might have done. He doesn’t

know I'm here, but I had to come. I had to be certain."

Mary's face twitched involuntarily; she was glad that the other woman's eyes were averted, and that she had an instant in which to compose herself.

"My husband—my husband told you that?" she asked incredulously.

"Yes," said Mrs. Mainwaring.

"Oh, poor John, poor John—he must be rather hard pressed to say such foolish things," Mary murmured, half to herself, with a ghost of a smile on her face.

"What do you mean?" asked Mrs. Mainwaring sharply.

"But you can set your mind at rest, Mrs. Mainwaring," she added proudly, and always trying to smile. "I shall never keep my husband against his will, and the moment he wishes to leave me he's free to go."

"You—really mean that?" asked Mrs. Mainwaring, her face lighting with happy surprise.

"Yes," Lady Carlton said solemnly, "and I imagine that that is all that we have to say to each other."

Mrs. Mainwaring looked intently at her and realized that she meant what she said. As she



again turned towards the door, it opened, and Sir John Carlton came in.

He was gravely clad, as befitted his important business and social position. His hair was gray in patches, and his determined chin was even more conspicuous than it had been when he had taken a young girl from the balcony of an English mansion. But any one who had known him in earlier years would have recognized him at once.

He stopped short as he saw Mrs. Mainwaring, and his face darkened. He threw a desperate glance at his wife, who was very self-possessed, much more so than her visitor, he thought.

“Mary,” he said in greeting.

“Yes, John,” she replied.

“John, I——” broke in Mrs. Mainwaring almost simultaneously.

Carlton silenced her with an angry glance.

Mary was looking straight before her, her eyes staring incredulously, although, in her heart, she had known for such a long time.

“Then you know, Mary?” asked John, with difficulty repeating her name. “You know?”

“Yes, John,” she said, wincing.

“But you were mistaken, John,” protested



Mrs. Mainwaring, a sudden note of hope in her voice.

“Mistaken?” asked Sir John. “What do you mean?”

“Your wife,” said Mrs. Mainwaring, with a burst of exultation, “says that she won’t stand in our way.”

“What do you mean by that?”

He walked towards her, fear and yet menace in his attitude. Then he turned to Mary, who stood there, trying to hide her face by lowering it. “Mary—what—what——?” he asked. “And what have you said?” he demanded of Mrs. Mainwaring. “What have you told her?”

“Lady Carlton understands,” she replied, with a yearning look at the man before her. “She’s willing to set you free, John.” She took her lower lip in her teeth and went on breathlessly, “She told me so, John.”

“Free?” asked John, turning towards his wife. “You would set me free? Is this true?”

Mary averted her eyes from him.

“Yes, John,” she said. “You can be free if you want to be.”

“Mary!” cried Carlton, a note of pure terror in his voice.

She stood motionless and silent, and the

pleading tone with which he again cried, "Mary," had no effect on her immobility. Sir John turned from his wife, and his demeanor became harsh as he asked Mrs. Mainwaring, "You—what have you told her? What are you doing here? What—lies have you told my wife?"

Mrs. Mainwaring seemed about to faint; she clasped her hands before her and cried, "Oh! Oh!"

"Now, answer me, answer me," went on Sir John vindictively.

"John!" commanded Lady Carlton.

He saw that he was gradually losing his hold on himself, and he said to her in a low voice, "I beg your pardon."

"I've not lied," protested Mrs. Mainwaring. "I told Lady Carlton that you loved me, and that you wanted to be free to marry me. Are those lies, John?" She looked yearningly toward him.

"Are those lies, John?" Mary asked, quietly.

"Yes—they are," he said. "I am very sorry that——"

"So you dare to——" Mrs. Mainwaring began, moving towards him.

"But not your lies," said Sir John with a

sorry smile. "They were mine." When he saw that Mrs. Mainwaring was about to speak, he urged, "No, please; whenever I spoke to you of love, I lied. You say you believed me." He gave a contemptuous laugh. "And have you always believed your lovers when they talked to you of their love?"

"You——" Mrs. Mainwaring stood there, sudden hatred written on her face.

"Well, why not?" Carlton asked. "You never pretended that I was the only one. Why keep that back now? We all swore we loved you. And if you believed us, you must have had a queer notion of love. But you no more believed in my love than I believed in yours."

"You——" Again she was unable to classify him as she wished.

"Cad," he volunteered—"quite so. And a great deal more than that—just cad. And now you want me to marry you! That certainly would be eternal punishment. We both deserve a special hell for our sins, and if we were married, we'd get it."

He went to the bell and pulled it, and then walked firmly towards the door. Mrs. Mainwaring watched him with burning eyes, and tossed her head as he opened the door and

nodded meaningly towards it. Scornfully she turned her eyes on Mary, and on John Carlton. As she came to her former lover, she looked at him from head to foot, and then turned back to Mary.

“So far as I am concerned, Lady Carlton,” she sneered, rage and contempt in her voice, “you may keep your husband—if you still want him.”

A half-smile came on Mary’s face.

“Thank you,” she said with the utmost of sincerity.





## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

MRS. MAINWARING strode through the door, and Carlton closed it behind her. This unexpected thunderbolt had shaken his poise. It was such an incident as he might have imagined many times in past years; and he had even considered how he might meet it when it came. But the reality, so abrupt, so terrible with its occurrence, and in its possible consequences, unnerved him. Though he was able to muster some degree of dignity, he was not the suave, masterful person who had, an hour ago, decided to leave a group of admirers at the club and go home to his wife's birthday party. He was years older; the onus of worries easily, or with effort, turned aside in the past overwhelmed him, all at once. He turned his face, with its baffled, sorrowful eyes, towards his wife, who stood before him, avoiding his inquiring gaze. She seemed very fragile now, very broken, as she slowly made her way to the sofa and sat down, mechanically picking up her crewel work. Her needle slowly drew the fine woolen thread

upwards and downwards through the cloth.

Mary's thoughts were in a whirl. She, too, might not have been so bewildered if she had known an hour before that Mrs. Mainwaring was about to make that astounding demand of her. She could have pondered other incidents, some of which took place almost simultaneously with John's assurance that they could now always have anything that money could buy. Often she had suspected, and sometimes she had been certain of, her husband's domestic lapses, but time had overcome them; he always had come back to her and unknowingly assured her that he loved his wife above all other women.

Of course, she had heard the gossip of this latest affair, and had been perplexed when her oldest son had come from the Star and Garter and answered a curt "Yes," when she asked him if he had seen his father there. She remembered that now, and knew the reason for the boy's recent tenderness towards her, and the cause of his youthful outburst that afternoon.

John Carlton walked down the room and with difficulty asked his wife, "Mary, is there anything—that you might want to say to me?"



*A First National Picture.*

*Secrets.*

ALWAYS THE PATIENT WATCHER OUTSIDE THE SICK ROOM.





She did not look up at him, but he could see a tear gently force itself through her lashes and fall on the work in which she seemed to have such a studious interest.

“Yes, John,” she said slowly, “I want you to tell me everything.”

“You mean—about her?” he asked reluctantly, hoping that she would not urge him to go into details which now seemed sordid and unworthy of description.

“No,” his wife replied quietly. “We’ve finished with her. I want to know about—the others.”

“The others!” he ejaculated, thoroughly frightened.

“Yes, John,” she insisted.

“What—what do you mean?” the man parried, trying to collect himself.

“I think you know what I mean, John,” she observed, her underlip quivering slightly, and more tears falling from her eyes. “Don’t you know, John?”

“Yes—but—how did you—how could you have heard?” he asked incredulously.

“There are always people anxious and—glad—to tell us such things,” she explained rather brokenly, “and often we—we women

don't need to be told. Somehow, we—know—sometimes.”

“You know?” he repeated fearfully.

“Yes, John,” she said.

She had not yet looked at him. He rather wished that she would glance up; he wanted to see her face, yet he winced at the thought of meeting her eyes. She quietly went on working, waiting without impatience for what she knew he must tell. Sir John made no effort to conceal his wretchedness; he had the appearance of a boy about to be thrashed as he started to pace the floor, halted, began to speak, and did not utter a sound. Finally he sighed, and admitted.

“It was at Montevideo, when I went there with Hawkes and McAllister in—in eighty-one that I—that I first—she was the widow of a South American rancher. We met on board.” He looked helplessly at his wife. “Mary,” he urged incoherently, “she was nothing to me—I swear it—she was nothing to me, nor I to her. We just met—and fooled—and somehow we—why, she wasn't even pretty—nor a lady. But you were far away. Thousands of miles away.

“Oh, what's the use of talking,” he cried

in desperation. "I—I can't explain. You'd never understand. Get rid of me. I'm all that woman said I was."

He walked to the fireplace and placed his hand on the mantelpiece, bending his head forward against it. His wife paid no more attention to his expressions or actions than as if he had been in another room. Her tears came steadily now, but she stolidly continued her needle-work. At no time did she raise her voice above a gentle, barely audible tone, which one who could not see her sad face would have thought devoid of any emotion other than sympathy.

"John, you haven't told me everything," she persisted after a slight pause.

He smiled grimly and shook his head.

"Well," he went on, "when I financed that comic opera in New York, there was a—a dancer in the company——" He turned towards Mary almost appealingly. "You wouldn't know her name if I told it to you. I——"

"You mean Cora Standish?" Mary suggested abruptly.

Again he was astounded, and he said, "Yes," with a deep sigh. "But why do you insist that I tell you——"



"I was in New York at that time," she declared.

"Yes," he agreed.

"And not thousands of miles away!"

"No," he said, and then, in extenuation, "Mary, I didn't bring that forward to excuse or defend myself. I knew well enough that I have no excuse nor defense. I wanted to try and explain."

Mary's mouth twisted in a plaintive smile.

"But that explanation doesn't apply in the case of Miss Standish," she said, this time sadly.

"No——" stammered Carlton. "There's only one explanation," he cried desperately, "the beast in me. If you wanted to force that—there it is. The beast! And I hated her all the time. I hated her as I hated all of them. You wanted everything; there it is," he said, extending his hands towards her. "Now, what are you going to do with me?"

Mary put down her crewelwork for the first time; the embroidery was irregular in spots, and had moist patches on it. She spoke slowly, following carefully the thoughts that came to her.

"Yes, it was wrong of me," she reflected,

raising her tear-dimmed eyes. "It was selfish and wrong. When I first guessed what was happening, I should have spoken. But I never wanted to be certain, John," she admitted with infinite tenderness. "I was so afraid that, if you realized that I knew, there'd be a barrier of distrust and shame between us. I thought only of myself; I should have thought of saving you."

"Me?" he asked in disgust. "I'm not worth saving from anything." Then, with sudden earnest entreaty, "Mary—Mary—I can't expect you to believe it. How could you? But I must tell you all the same. Never once—never for a moment——"

His wife was looking at him expectantly, with wide, inquiring eyes; he glanced at her, faltered, and sat down in the armchair, burying his face in his hands.

"What's the use—what's the use?" he maundered. "You wouldn't believe it. You'd never understand."

Mary, her whole body quivering, looked at him, the dawn of a tender smile upon her lips. Her moist eyes gleamed with hope, as she called gently, "John."

He lifted his face from his hands.

“You want to tell me, don’t you,” she begged, as the tears, now unrestrained, flowed down her cheeks, “that you never once stopped loving me, even when you were the most unfaithful? You want to tell me,” she pleaded, “that those women were nothing to you—that I was really everything—always.”

“Yes—yes—yes,” he assented, with passionate eagerness.

Her sorrow-racked features relaxed and became a vision of loveliness. Once more she struggled with the tears.

“Do you think that I didn’t know that?” she asked intensely. “Do you think that I could ever have borne it if I hadn’t been as sure of your love as I was sure of the love of God?”

Carlton was awe-struck.

“You—you knew? You understood?” he cried. Then, upon his next thought, he said soberly, “But that woman said you were willing to let me go.”

“Mrs. Mainwaring told me that you wanted your freedom. Do you suppose, John,” she asked proudly, “I should ever hold you to me against your will?”

“I was lying,” he protested.

“Yes, John, I know you were,” she said with a sigh. He did not speak, and she took up her work again. He was staring at her, breathing quickly.

“Mary,” he said suddenly, with more pleading than command in his voice, “come here; I want you.”

“Oh, John,” she breathed.

“I want you—I need you,” he persisted. She hesitated for a moment and went to him. He was about to seize her hands, but he remembered suddenly, and stopped. Speaking through gritted teeth, he asked:

“You can still love me—in spite of all this?”

“Yes, John,” she said, her chin quivering.

“Why should you love me?” he demanded violently, still restraining his fierce desire to touch her. “Why should you ever have loved me? I’ve always been a brute and a bully. I’ve always wanted things and gone for them over broken hearts and lives. Money—power—women—I wanted them all and I got them. But none of them means anything to me now. All I want in the world is your love and forgiveness.”

“Oh, John,” she cried tremulously. “It’s not my forgiveness you should ask.”



“Mary,” he urged, “think of what’s still to come. My name will soon be blazed abroad for all the world to read. Your friends will pity and despise you. Our children will know their father for the man he is. Our children,” he cried despairingly. “My God—my God!” He knelt at her feet, clutching pathetically for her hands.

Once more she became strongly assertive, and her face took on an attitude of determination.

“John—John—stand up, John—stand up,” she directed. “You’re strong and brave,” she told the weakened figure before her. “You’ve brought all this on yourself, and you must go through with it—like the man you are. We won a fight once over there—when there seemed no hope. There’s a harder battle before us now, dear—but we’ll win—if we fight together.”

“Together—together?” he whispered.

“Yes, John,” she promised. “I shall always be at your side when you want me.”

“When I want you—want you?” he exclaimed. “Oh, Mary,” his broken voice assured her, as he knelt at her feet and kissed her hand, “I shall always want you.”

## EPILOGUE

It was almost dawn, but a score of dim lights shone through the curtains of the house on Porchester Terrace. Decorously placed globes gleamed gently on the high walls on either side of the carriage entrance, and cast a glow on the masses of shrubbery along the driveway which led to the house. Dr. Arbuthnot's limousine was still near the front door, darkly shaded by an overhanging willow. His chauffeur had long since abandoned talk with the man who now slept at the wheel of one of the Carlton motors, and who had been ordered to wait—for anything that might happen. Sir John was dying, and there was no telling what might be needed during the night.

Mary Carlton still sat in the big easy-chair before the fire in Sir John's dressing room. Her hands were clasped over the leather-bound book as though in prayer, and she was now fast asleep.

The door of the bedroom opened, and the hand of a nurse softly drew back the curtain

to allow Dr. Arbuthnot to precede her from the sick-room. She closed the door, and, as the physician made his way towards Mary's chair, he motioned for her to follow, placing a warning finger on his lips.

"She's fast asleep," he said in a low voice.

"Poor old lady," sympathized the nurse; "she was absolutely worn out."

"We'll let her sleep as long as possible," decided Dr. Arbuthnot. "Our news can wait. They don't breed such women nowadays. You had better tell the others not to come up just yet."

"Very well, sir." She nodded and went towards the farther door of the room.

Mary Carlton suddenly sat upright and opened her eyes.

"Yes, John——?" she asked, listening intently.

"Lady Carlton—I—I thought I——" began the doctor, coming quickly to her side.

She got up from her chair after a second's bewilderment, and clutched at his hand.

"Doctor—tell me—tell me."

"I've got good news for you, dear lady," he assured her smilingly.

“Good? Good?” she asked in an ecstatic whisper.

“Very good,” he repeated. “Sir John has responded amazingly to Sir Gilbert’s treatment.”

“Yes——?” she asked as before, beside herself with joy.

“The action of the heart is stronger and more regular,” he announced, “and his breathing is easier. We’ve tided over the crisis and can now hope for the best.”

“You—mean—he’ll—live?” the old lady asked intensely, still clutching his hand.

“Yes, Lady Carlton.”

She burst into a fit of sobbing, and the doctor gently forced her back into her chair. She wiped the tears from her eyes, and after a moment or two looked up at him.

“It’s silly to—to cry when one’s happy—so happy,” she announced with a quavering little laugh. “Now I must go to him,” she added, rising determinedly.

“Not quite yet, please, Lady Carlton,” he urged, placing a detaining hand on her shoulder.

“But he’ll want me,” she said in astonishment at the enforced delay.



“Of course he will,” Dr. Arbuthnot agreed soothingly. “And Sir Gilbert will tell you at once when he’s strong enough to see you.”

“But the children—the children,” she broke in suddenly. “Do they know? They’ll be so glad.”

“Nurse has gone to tell them the good news,” he told her.

“The children,” she repeated musingly, with a little smile; “they don’t quite understand. They’re so young and bright and clever. They know so much more than we older people in so many ways. But there are some things,” she added with a sigh of happiness, “that they don’t know as well as we do. Oh, nurse”—the nurse came from another room—“have you told them?”

“Yes, Lady Carlton,” she said.

“Aren’t they very happy?” she asked with eagerness.

“Yes, indeed,” the nurse replied. “They’re most relieved, and they told me to be sure and see that you didn’t overtire yourself.”

“Overtire!” She and the doctor smiled at each other. “Thank you, nurse, I’m going to take the greatest care of myself.” The doctor

alone detected the slightly ironical touch in her voice. "You see, Doctor," she went on, more gravely, "that's just what I mean. They don't quite understand."

"No?" he inquired politely.

"As though there could be such a thing as overtiring oneself in the service of love," she explained. "But they'll understand that one day. Like everything else, love needs practice to become perfect. And I've loved—and I've been loved—for over fifty years. Doctor," she continued, with a change of voice, "such a wonderful thing happened to me just now."

"Indeed?" he asked.

"Yes, it was all very wonderful," she pursued eagerly. "I sat down here and re—I mean, thought—for a few moments, and suddenly all my life came back to me. And such a long and varied life it's been. Sweet things and sad, good things and dreadful, big and little—they all rushed back into my mind. In this short time, I relived the past, and, Doctor, I seemed to understand my life for the first time. I saw the good and bad and big and little were all bound together by a chain of love. They mattered not at all in themselves, and

differed so little from each other, because that chain had never once been broken. Sometimes it was almost broken—but never quite.”

“And then you woke, dear lady,” he volunteered, a slight mist in his eyes, “to happiness again.”

“Oh, to happiness—to happiness beyond all words,” came from the depths of her heart.

“Now, Doctor,” she said with sudden decision, “I must tidy my hair a bit, for Sir John may be calling for me almost any moment.”

She went to the mirror and carefully tucked stray wisps of silver beneath her cap. Then she patted the locks and straightened the white lace until it was in perfect order.

“Sir John was always very particular about my hair,” she explained with delicious coquetry. “Do I look all right?” she asked wistfully.

There came the faint rustling of the draperies, and the door of the bedroom opened again. As Mary turned around, she saw the nurse, smiling and beckoning.

“Lady Carlton,” she said.

A touch of red came into Lady Carlton’s whitened cheeks, as she stood there for a moment, her eyes glistening again with youth, her

whole form trembling. Another secret—the greatest of all—caused her heart to pound wildly. Some day—it would be before long now—she could share it with the man who lay on the bed inside.

She went to the door, and saw before her her husband, no longer deathly pale and motionless. He was refusing the ministrations of the nurse, and as he pushed her away with one arm, he stretched another towards the opened door.

“Mary,” his weak voice begged, “come here; I want you.”

She walked towards him with outstretched arms.

“Yes, John,” she murmured.

THE END



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